



Popular, but largely unresearched

How does a vegan or vegetarian diet affect health? This is what the COPLANT study is investigating on a large scale. Researchers are looking for around 6,000 people across Germany to participate starting at the end of 2022.

Interest in vegan and vegetarian diets is growing – especially among younger people. Nevertheless, hardly any scientifically reliable data exists on the effects of a plant-based diet on the body so far. The COPLANT study aims to change this. It is intended to close data gaps, thus allowing scientifically based dietary recommendations for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. COPLANT (COhort on PLANT-based diets) until now is the largest planned study on plant-based nutrition in the German-speaking world – a project of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), the Max Rubner Institute, the Research Institute for Plant-Based Nutrition and the Universities of Jena, Bonn, Heidelberg, Regensburg and Kiel. The Thünen Institute is involved in the topic of sustainability. Partners in Austria and Switzerland also want to participate. The project is being supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

Starting at the end of 2022, the BfR and its partners are looking for around 6,000 people aged 18 to 69 who would like to participate.

Hot lead

A smaller preliminary study at the BfR conducted in 2020 provided initial evidence that a vegan diet could have an impact on bones and nutrient supply: the vegans studied had lower bone health in terms of density and elasticity. Furthermore, vegans had conspicuously low levels of iodine in their urine – an element vital for growth, bones and the brain. On the other hand, they were well supplied with vitamin B12, which is essential for nerve and blood cells, although it is seldom found in plant-based diets. The reason: those who follow a vegan diet usually supplement vitamin B12 in the form of tablets, capsules or drops.

Comprehensive data will now be collected within the COPLANT study, which will run for several years. The study’s main questions are: which vitamins and minerals are consumed sufficiently or too little? What happens in the metabolism when we abstain from foods of animal origin and consume novel vegan foods? What is the effect of individual diets on muscle mass, fat content and bones? In addition, research will be conducted into the extent to which a plant-based diet differs from a mixed diet with regard to heavy metals, mould toxins and other undesirable substances.

Who can join?

The project is looking for women and men who are between the age of 18 and 69 and have been following a vegan (no animal products), vegetarian (no meat and fish, but dairy products and eggs), pescetarian (like vegetarians plus fish) or omnivorous (plant and animal products) diet for at least one year. Those who take part can make an important contribution to research in the field of plant-based nutrition and gain valuable information about their own health. ■



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What is a plant-based diet?

From vegan to flexitarian – so far there is no uniform definition of which diets constitute a plant-based diet. The consensus is that its main components should be of pure plant origin, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, oils, grains and legumes. Depending on the diet, dairy products, eggs, fish and seafood may be added. The research focus of the COPLANT study is on vegan, vegetarian and pescetarian diets.

COPLANT

Participate in the study:
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More information:
www.bfr.bund.de > A-Z Index: COPLANT study
 (in German)