

## Reproductive profile of vegetarian and non-vegetarian women

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### ABSTRACT

A sample of 200 postmenopausal women (100 vegetarians and 100 nonvegetarians) above the age of 50 years from various localities/ strata of Ludhiana city of Punjab were randomly selected. The observations on socio-economic status revealed that majority of the subjects (68% vegetarians and 71% nonvegetarians) were housewives with business as their family occupation. All of them were engaged in sedentary life style pattern. Information regarding reproductive profile depicted that the mean age of menarche was 14.11 years in vegetarians as compared to 12.78 years in nonvegetarians. Menstrual cycle was found to be regular in majority of the subjects. Further, 60 per cent vegetarians and 61 per cent nonvegetarians were married by the age of 17-21 years and majority of the subjects were in the age group of 18-22 years at the time of their first pregnancy. The data further showed that mean age of menopause was 47.08 years in vegetarians as compared to 48.04 years in nonvegetarians. Seventy seven per cent of nonvegetarians experienced gradual cessation of period as against 63 per cent of vegetarians. The prevalence of menopausal symptoms was high in nonvegetarians (90%) as compared to vegetarians (60%). The main symptoms experienced were hot flushes, mood changes and night sweats. Further, clinical symptoms such as pain in joints, visual impairments and high blood pressure were reported to be common in 75 per cent nonvegetarians and 69 per cent vegetarians. The presence of chronic diseases as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular were reported to be lower in vegetarians (45% vs 65%) subjects.

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Menopause is a reproductive milestone in a woman's life. It is a natural ageing process that marks the end of woman's reproductive years. It does not arrive suddenly and takes around 3-4 years beginning with perimenopause, when body starts running out of eggs, ovulation becomes sporadic, hormone levels fluctuate and cycle becomes unpredictable. Therefore, age at menopause is not same for all the women. Multi-factors such as birth weight, age of menarche, family history, socio-economic status, period of breast feeding etc. play an important role in predicting woman's age at menopause. Most women enter menopause between the age of 45-55 years, an average of about 51 years. However, in developed countries median age of menopause is about 50 years and about one third of life span is spent after menopause (Krishna, 1998). Medical opinion has always projected menopause as malady because of its association with a variety of acute and chronic conditions. Estrogen produced by the ovaries is crucial for the healthy functioning of a woman's reproductive system. Decreased production of this hormone can produce variety of symptoms. Reproductive factors rather than socio-economic and behavioral factors appeared to be associated with weight change during menopause (Chisato, 2002).

The right type of diet can help a woman to battle many of these risks and discomforts. There are substantial

evidences suggesting that vegetarianism is a healthy food practice which can lower the risk of a number of chronic diseases. Therefore, the present study was planned to study the reproductive profile including the prevalence of risks and discomforts associated with menopause in vegetarian and nonvegetarian women.

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ludhiana city of Punjab state. Two hundred (100 vegetarians and 100 nonvegetarians) postmenopausal women above the age of 50 years from various localities / strata were randomly selected for the survey.

#### *Criteria for selection of the subjects:*

Vegetarian : Excluding meat, poultry and fish from their diet.

Nonvegetarian : Including all food categories.

The interview schedule was developed to obtain the desired information. The reliability / feasibility of the schedule was worked out by pretesting on ten subjects (5 vegetarians and 5 nonvegetarians). Based on the response received during pretesting, certain necessary changes were incorporated in the schedule. Hence, the pretested and reconstructed schedule was used to collect ultimate data for present study.