



Are Religions “Healthy”? A Review on Religious Recommendations on Diet and Lifestyle

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ABSTRACT The evidence supporting a relationship between religion, either in terms of lifestyle or diet, and physical health has increased substantially in the recent past. Particular interest is paid to how specific dietary religious patterns can influence health status positively in terms of incidence and prevalence of chronic diseases and their risk factors. From reviewing the available information in this area, it is concluded that some religions, such as Orthodox Christianity and Seventh-Day Adventism, prescribe both dietary or lifestyle doctrines, such as avoiding alcohol and smoking and encouraging physical activity, which promote health and could prevent the development of a number of diet-related diseases. However, it is suggested that it is these healthy behaviors themselves that are responsible for the health benefits found within religious groups and not just the adherence to a specific religion. Nevertheless, other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jehova’s witness, either promote strict vegetarianism, which could become life-threatening leading to megaloblastic anemia or severe iron deficiency anemia, or prescribe specific medical observances that could have harmful effects. Furthermore, religious practices usually encourage the use of preventative care services, while spirituality enhances coping with mental and physical illnesses.

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