Is Vegetarianism to Blame for India's Diabetes Epidemic?! Transcript

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Indiau2019s Diabetes Burden

Why is India known as the diabetes capital of the world? About 70 million people currently have diabetes. Heart disease is prevalent. India also has the highest concentrations of vegetarians and vegans throughout the World.

I've been to India many times. I have many relatives who are vegeterians, so I know what they consume.

Diet, Carbs, and Type 2 Diabetes

90% of their diet is carbohydrate. White rice, potatoes, lentils. First off, carbohydrates do not cause type 2 diabetes. Excess calorie consumption, whether from carbohydrates or fat, leading to body fat gain, is the primary driver.

And the amount of bodyfat that someone can gain before they develop type two diabetes is variable and largely based on genetics. South Asians, including Indians for example, tend to develop type 2 diabetes at lower body weights than other populations.

Vegetarian and Vegan Diet Evidence

So just pointing the finger at their diet isn't really fair here. And we actually have a recent meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials in people with type-2 diabetes in which vegetarian and vegan diets led to reductions in BMI and improvements in hemoglobin A1c, which is a very important marker of blood glucose control.

And in most of those trials, the plant-based diet was rich in carbohydrates and being compared to a relatively healthy, lower carb diet, so not just the standard American diet.

South Asian Risk and Healthy Plant Foods

And if we look at South Asians in the Masala study, even small shifts in their diet towards more healthy plant foods like fruits, veggies, and whole grains, which are rich with carbohydrates, was associated with an 18% reduction in the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

So yes, diabetes is rampant in India, but we have to understand that diabetes a multifactorial disease and we can't just point the finger at the high rates of vegetarianism.