

Benefits of the Mediterranean lifestyle



The Mediterranean diet is a dietary pattern or lifestyle discovered and studied in the 1940s. Researchers discovered people who lived along the Mediterranean Sea were living long healthy lives.

Comparing the lifestyles of Americans to the lifestyles of men in seven different Mediterranean countries, researchers attributed the lower rates of heart disease to differences in diet and physical activity in the Mediterranean countries.

The first key to the Mediterranean diet or lifestyle is planning meals and physical activity that revolves around friends and family. Fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, legumes, nuts, seeds, olive oils, herbs and spices are the foundation of the diet.

Fish and seafood are the primary sources of protein. Poultry, eggs, cheese and yogurt are eaten in moderate amounts. Finally, meats and sweets are eaten in limited quantities. Wine and/or water are the drinks of choice.

Many of the differences are attributed to the difference in agriculture and availability of food resources of each region. Consequently, this region is focused around low calorie, low fat foods.

Fruits and vegetables are high in nutrients and low in calories. Beans, nuts and seeds are a good source of protein, healthy fats, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Beans are a good substitute for meat with their protein, iron and zinc content.

Olive oil is the main source of fat in the Mediterranean diet. High in heart-healthy monounsaturated fat and low in saturated fat, olive oil can raise good cholesterol and lower bad cholesterol and helps the body absorb vitamins A, D, E and K better.

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Lower rates of heart disease and breast cancer are linked to olive oil consumption. Seafood includes fish and shellfish that are eaten as the main source of protein that is lower in saturated fat than meat. It also contains the healthy fats omega-3s.

Finally, red wine is the main type of alcohol in the diet that contains the heart-healthy resveratrol. It is recommended that women have one five-ounce glass per day and up to two five-ounce glasses per day for men.

Studying the Mediterranean diet continues today because of the health benefits it offers. Recently, it was reported in the Tufts University “Health & Nutrition Letter” from the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, this diet or lifestyle is not only linked to lower risk of heart disease, stroke and metabolic syndrome, it may even be associated with less damage to small blood vessels in the brain. Therefore, it is linked to less late-life cognitive impairment or dementia.

The Mediterranean diet offers a good example of the USDA dietary guidelines. They both follow a pattern of lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein from a variety of sources, low-fat dairy, water and physical activity every day. So the recommended diet for healthy living is nothing new—even to Americans.

However, it seems harder for Americans to make this type of diet as part of a lifestyle. If you are not ready to start eating like a Mediterranean in every aspect of your diet, research shows a good place to start would be to change the consumption of saturated fats (e.g. butter, lard) and replace that with monounsaturated fats such as olive oil.

Olive oil can be used to cook vegetables, meat and fish. It can also be used as a dressing for salad and as a substitute for butter in most baked goods.

Look at the following online resource for more information related to the Mediterranean diet: www.oldwayspt.org

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