

TOGETHERNESS

Conviviality: The Act of Sharing Meals

The Mediterranean Diet, with its emphasis on balanced nutrition, also features communal eating, both of which contribute to longevity and reduced morbidity. A key element of the Mediterranean Diet is truly the vital role of “conviviality,” or the act of sharing meals, in promoting well-being and social connections. Just as single ingredients are not about merely fulfilling single nutrient needs but also is about building and maintaining strong social relationships, which can have a profound impact on health and well-being. Additionally, sharing meals forms the cornerstone of cultural identity and the ongoing traditions of communities across the Mediterranean region.



TogetherNESS

The concept of “conviviality,” which refers to sharing meals and eating together, is central to the Mediterranean Diet. This aspect is often underestimated but is indeed a vital element of the Mediterranean Diet, playing a role in enhancing well-being. Conviviality nurtures robust social relationships, promotes cultural interchange, and strengthens ties across generations, especially during festive occasions and community gatherings. Additionally, it develops a positive relationship with foods, ingredients, and cooking.

Conviviality and Health

Conviviality and health are closely intertwined; positive social interactions reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance happiness and well-being. Additionally, the act of sharing meals with others leads to better dietary choices and overall well-being. Adults that share a meal consume more fruits and vegetables! Additionally, the Mediterranean Diet, with its emphasis on communal eating, is linked to lower risks of diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

Children and Family Meals

The majority of parents are already aware that family dinners have positive effects on children’s physical well-being, cognitive development, and mental health. Over a span of more than twenty years, research consistently demonstrates that children who share meals with their families perform better academically, have expanded vocabularies, and exhibit lower instances of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Additionally, they maintain healthier dietary habits and enjoy improved cardiovascular health.

Eating with others, regardless of parental status, tends to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables and reduce fast food consumption. Home-cooked meals are associated with a lower risk of obesity compared to dining out. Additionally, parents who eat with their children tend to make healthier food choices and eat more mindfully. For children, eating family meals correlates with lower obesity rates.

Mental Health

Shared meals play a role in promoting healthy diets and positive mental health outcomes. Regular family meals are associated with reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents. Additionally, food conviviality encourages children to develop healthier eating habits and reduces the risk of obesity. Shared meals can also improve mental well-being by cultivating a sense of connection. Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet has been positively related to subjective happiness and health related quality of life in adolescents, including psychological wellbeing and better mood.

References

Dominguez, L. J., Giovanna, B. D., Veronese, N., & Barbagallo, M. (2021). Impact of Mediterranean Diet on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases and Longevity. *Nutrients*, 13(6).

Sobal, J., & Hanson, K. (2011). Family meals and body weight in US adults. *Public Health Nutrition*, 14(9), 1555-1562.

Medina FX. Looking for Commensality: On Culture, Health, Heritage, and the Mediterranean Diet. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Mar 5;18(5):2605.

Ferrer-Cascales, R.; Albaladejo-Blázquez, N.; Ruiz-Robledillo, N.; Clement-Carbonell, V.; Sánchez-SanSegundo, M.; Zaragoza-Martí, A. Higher Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet is Related to More Subjective Happiness in Adolescents: The Role of Health-Related Quality of Life. *Nutrients* 2019, 11, 698.

Mujcic R, J Oswald A. Evolution of Well-Being and Happiness After Increases in Consumption of Fruit and Vegetables. *Am J Public Health*. 2016 Aug;106(8):1504-10.

Chae, W., Ju, Y.J., Shin, J. et al. Association between eating behavior and diet quality: eating alone vs. eating with others. *Nutr J* 17, 117 (2018)

Agathão BT, Cunha DB, Sichieri R, Lopes CS. The role of family meal frequency in common mental disorders in children and adolescents over eight months of follow-up. *PLoS One*. 2021 Feb 4;16(2)

Dallacker M, Knobl V, Hertwig R, Mata J. Effect of Longer Family Meals on Children's Fruit and Vegetable Intake: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2023