

## SHOPPING &amp; TASTING THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

# MED DIET & GOOD HEALTH

The eating patterns of Mediterranean regions have been studied for more than six decades.

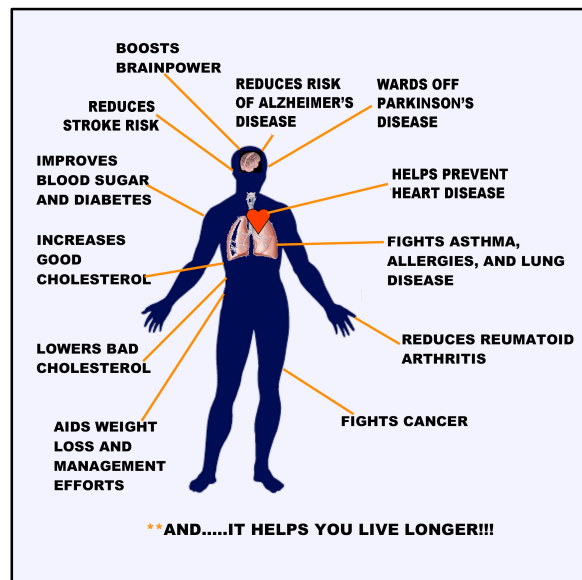
The first study examined the health status of the people of Crete at the end of the 1940s. It reached the startling conclusion that even after the deprivations of World War II, the cardiovascular health of Crete residents exceeded that of US residents. Researchers attributed the differences to diet.

Shortly after World War II, Ancel Keys and colleagues (including Paul Dudley White, President Eisenhower's heart doctor) organized the remarkable Seven Countries Study to examine the hypothesis that Mediterranean-eating patterns contributed directly to improved health outcomes. Though this study had some limitations by today's standards, it laid solid groundwork for the connection between diet and health in general, and the Mediterranean diet and good health in particular.

In the following decades, hundreds if not thousands of rigorous studies have solidly documented the many benefits of the Mediterranean diet and similar traditional, largely plant-based diets. Out of this extensive work came an understanding that certain Mediterranean-eating patterns were remarkably connected with lifelong good health.

The growing body of medical and scientific evidence supporting the healthfulness of the Mediterranean diet, or the **"Gold Standard" for healthful eating** (as it is often called), continues to show that following a Mediterranean diet may:\*

1. Lengthen your life
2. Defend against chronic diseases
3. Fight cancer
4. Lower your risk for experiencing heart disease along with high blood pressure and elevated "bad" cholesterol levels
5. Protect you from diabetes
6. Aid your weight loss and management efforts
7. Prevent depression
8. Safeguard you from Alzheimer's disease
9. Ward off Parkinson's disease
10. Improve rheumatoid arthritis
11. Help you breathe better



*\*Supporting studies are available on the Oldways Website. See a selection on the following pages.*

For more recent Mediterranean Diet studies, visit [www.oldwayspt.org/resources/health-studies](http://www.oldwayspt.org/resources/health-studies)

#### Mediterranean Diet Linked with Better Brain Structure in Elderly

The Mediterranean diet has long been associated with healthy aging, but emerging research is shedding new light onto why this might be. Researchers analyzed the eating patterns and brain size in 674 elderly (average age 80) adults without dementia in New York City. They found that those most closely following the Mediterranean diet had larger brains (total brain volume, grey matter, and white matter), with an effect similar to 5 years of aging. Of the specific foods studied, eating 3-5 oz fish weekly, and keeping meat intake under 3.5 oz per day, was also linked with larger brain volumes, equivalent to about 3-4 years of aging. These results suggest that a Mediterranean diet, especially one that encourages fish consumption over meat consumption, could promote brain health, as brain atrophy (brain shrinkage) has been linked with cognitive decline.

*Neurology*. 2015 Oct 21. (Gu Y et al.) [Epub ahead of print.]

#### Mediterranean Diet May Prevent Eye Disease

Macular degeneration, an eye condition that can lead to blindness, has no cure or restorative treatment, so prevention is especially important. To study how diet is related to this condition, scientists analyzed the eating patterns of over 2,500 adults, then monitored their eye health for thirteen years. They found that those most closely following the Mediterranean diet (especially those people eating lots of fish and vegetables) were 26% less likely to progress to advanced age-related macular degeneration. Results varied by genetics, with certain gene carriers being more responsive to diet than others. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2015

Nov;102(5):1196-206. (Merle BM et al.)

#### Med Diet with Olive Oil May Prevent Diabetic Eye Damage

Complications from diabetes can lead to serious health problems, including vision impairment, blindness, and kidney damage. Using data from the PREDIMED study (where adults at risk for heart disease were assigned to either a low fat diet, a Mediterranean diet with olive oil, or a Mediterranean diet with nuts), researchers analyzed data from over 3,600 Spanish adults with type 2 diabetes, to see how diet affects the risk of diabetic nephropathy (kidney damage from diabetes) or diabetic retinopathy (eye damage from diabetes). Those following a Mediterranean diet with olive oil had a 43% lower risk of diabetic retinopathy compared to the low fat control group, and those following a Mediterranean diet with nuts had a non-significant 38% lower risk of diabetic retinopathy. There were no significant changes in the risk for diabetic nephropathy.

*Diabetes Care*. 2015 Sept 13. [Epub ahead of print] (Diaz-Lopez A et al.)

### Replace Butter with Fish, Nuts, Seeds, and Lower Risk of Heart Disease by 25%

Harvard researchers followed over 120,000 adults for 24-30 years, tracking their diet and health records. The scientists found that replacing 5% of daily calories from saturated fat with polyunsaturated fats (found in fish, nuts, seeds, and safflower oil), monounsaturated fats (found in olive oil and canola oil), or whole grains is linked with a 25%, 15%, and 9% lower risk of heart disease, respectively. Additionally, they found that replacing 5% of daily calories from refined grains and added sugars with whole grains or polyunsaturated fats can also significantly reduce heart disease risk, and that replacing saturated fat with refined grains or added sugars does not lower heart disease risk. The researchers concluded, “Our findings provide epidemiological evidence of the current dietary guidelines, which recommend both “replacing saturated fatty acids with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids” and “replacing refined grains with whole grains.”” The Mediterranean diet, which spotlights whole grains, fish, olive oil, nuts, and seeds, is the perfect eating plan to put these lessons into practice. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. 2015 Oct;66(14):1538-48. (Li Y et al.)

### Mediterranean and Vegetarian Diets May Benefit Gut Microbiome

Eating a variety of healthy plant foods is one of the best ways to nurture our friendly gut bacteria, and new research suggests that Mediterranean and vegetarian diets may be useful models. Scientists analyzed the eating patterns and gut bacteria of 153 Italian adults. They found that those most closely following a Mediterranean diet or vegetarian/vegan diet had higher levels of short chain fecal acids, a compound associated with many health benefits. On the other hand, those not following a Mediterranean diet had higher levels of urinary trimethylamine oxide, a potential risk factor for heart disease. The researchers also noted that both vegetarian/vegans and those on a Mediterranean diet scored highly on the Healthy Food Diversity Index, meaning that these eating styles could be a useful blueprint for people wanting to incorporate a variety of nutritious foods into their diet.

*Gut*. 2015 Sept 28. [Epub ahead of print] (De Filippis F et al.)