

[IMAGE]

Eating a Mediterranean Diet May Increase Life Expectancy

It's no secret that a diet high in fiber and low in saturated fats has myriad health benefits. Conversely, numerous studies have reported the consequences of a poor diet, including obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes, all of which can lead to early mortality.

Researchers examined the effects of a modified Mediterranean diet on elderly participants from nine European countries to determine its impact on longevity. A Mediterranean diet was characterized by a high intake of fruits, vegetables and unrefined whole grains; a moderate to high intake of fish; a low intake of saturated lipids, but a high intake of unsaturated lipids, namely olive oil; a low intake of meat; a low to modest intake of dairy products; and a modest intake of wine. Participants included 74,600 men and women, ages 60 or older, with no prior history of heart disease, stroke, or cancer. Dietary intake was assessed at baseline, as was additional data on lifestyle and health. Adherence to the Mediterranean diet was measured using a 10-point scale, 0 being least, 9 being maximum adherence. Study participants were followed for approximately seven years.

Results found that mortality rates dropped 8 percent for each two-point adherence increase on the Mediterranean diet scale. A stronger rate of survival was found among participants in Greece and Spain, which the authors attributed to the fact that people in those countries already adhere to the Mediterranean diet as a part of their regular lifestyles. When the diet score was calibrated across the countries, the reduction in mortality was 7 percent.

Conclusion: "Adherence to a diet relying on plant foods and unsaturated lipids and that resembles the Mediterranean diet, may be particularly appropriate for elderly people, who represent a rapidly increasing group in Europe," the researchers wrote.

No matter what type of diet you settle on, remember that a healthy eating plan consists of plenty of fruits and vegetables, unsaturated fats, whole grains and a limited sugar intake. For more information on health and nutrition, visit www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/nutrition.

Reference:

Trichopoulou A, Orfanos P, Norat T, et al. Modified Mediterranean diet and survival: EPIC-elderly prospective cohort study. *BMJ online*. Apr 8, 2005; doi:10.1136/bmj.38415.644155.8F.

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