

[IMAGE]

Living Well – The Mediterranean Way

By Julie T. Chen, MD

I talk to my patients in my integrative medicine clinic almost daily about diet. My patients want to know what diet to adopt with all the abundant information out there nowadays on the Internet.

Earlier this year, a study was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found obesity rates have not changed much in the past few years, with the condition still affecting more than one-third of Americans.¹ To make matters worse, obesity has been found to increase blood pressure, induce diabetes, and increases the risk for heart disease, osteoarthritis, and respiratory problems.²

Though we may not like to admit it, obesity, heart disease, and our health in general are most definitely linked to our diet. What we eat not only affects how we feel, grow, and live; it also affects the expression of certain negative genetic traits.³⁻⁵ So, when the Mediterranean diet began making the rounds in the health and diet world, it immediately caught my attention. Could a traditional diet increase vitality and health, and lower the risk of heart disease or other medical conditions? Do we now have a reason to eat more Greek salads, olives and hummus?

In 2008, a meta-analysis of 12 studies, involving a total of 1,574,299 subjects, was published in the *British Medical Journal*.⁶ The researchers carefully and systematically analyzed 12 studies with cohorts from the Mediterranean and elsewhere around the world and studied the effects of adhering to a Mediterranean diet. Their primary goal was to investigate the relationship between adherence to a Mediterranean diet and mortality and chronic diseases.

The results were excellent if you're fond of tabouleh and red cabbage. The meta-analysis found that a greater adherence to the Mediterranean diet is associated with a significant improvement in overall health: 9 percent reduction in overall mortality, 9 percent reduction in mortality from cardiovascular diseases, 6 percent reduction in incidence of or mortality from cancer, and a 13 percent reduction in the incidence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. These numbers are big news and further support the Mediterranean diet's role in the primary prevention of major chronic illnesses.

Here's a quick snapshot of what the Mediterranean diet includes:⁷ vegetables (broccoli, pumpkin, beets, arugula, artichokes), fruits (apples, apricots, avocados, peaches, oranges, pomegranates), olives and olive oil, nuts, beans, legumes, yogurt, fish and shellfish (shrimp, squid, mackerel, mussels, octopus, sardines, oysters), eggs, meats (in smaller portions), and a glass of red wine a day.

I think moderation and adherence to the Mediterranean diet can have some really amazing and wonderful effects on your health, longevity and overall well-being. The fun part of sticking to a Mediterranean diet (as opposed to all the other fad diets) is you can have a ton of fun learning to cook with new ingredients, taste incredibly delicious dishes, and develop a healthier long-term lifestyle that's both enjoyable and non-restrictive. It's inclusive instead of being exclusive. None of your friends may want to come over for a chalky protein shake or join you on a strict juice cleanse, but I guarantee you'll find someone who'll come over for grilled fish, kalamata olives, and fresh hummus with cucumber chips.

So, while our lives are busy and our schedules hectic, we can always make time for good times with our friends – and why not spend that time learning to cook the Mediterranean way?

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