

Lifewire: More praise for the Mediterranean model

by Ven_Griva

For health experts, the popularity of the Mediterranean diet keeps growing. In fact, the next time you dine out, your doctor might praise you for choosing a Greek salad plate with split pea soup, broiled fish and tzatziki sauce.

The traditional Mediterranean diet features an abundance of vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts and cereals and regular use of olive oil. It also includes moderate amounts of fish and dairy products - mostly yogurt or cheese and small amounts of red meat. Alcohol is usually in the form of wine consumed at meals.

Take for instance that salad, with its raw vegetables, provides the phytochemicals that help our immune systems fight off cancer. Foods commonly found in the Mediterranean diet such as whole grains, vegetables, beans, fruits and herbs contain many phytochemicals.

As for that broiled fish, research shows that fish is high in omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential to human health but cannot be manufactured by the body. Eating fish is good way to boost our intake of omega-3 fatty acids. Olive oil is another good source of omega-3 fatty acids, not to mention a source of unsaturated fat.

Research shows that omega-3 fatty acids help lower LDL cholesterol. That's the bad cholesterol that sticks to the inside of our blood veins, causing the kinds of clogs that lead to heart attacks and strokes. On the other hand, omega-3 fatty acids appear to boost HDL cholesterol, the good cholesterol that research shows fights against stroke and heart disease.

And the tzatziki sauce is made from yogurt, cucumber, dill, lemon juice and garlic. Research indicates that the potential health attributes associated with eating yogurt stretch beyond protein and calcium. Increased consumption of the live cultures found in yogurt help increase resistance to immune-related diseases such as cancer and infection, particularly gastrointestinal infection.

Not only will the meal be good for you, it will taste good, too.

LUNG BENEFITS

Now comes research that shows another way the Mediterranean diet helps to prolong life.

The Mediterranean diet cuts in half the chances of developing progressive inflammatory lung disease, reveals a large study, published in Thorax.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is an umbrella term for chronic lung diseases, such as emphysema and bronchitis. It is expected to become the third leading cause of death worldwide by 2020, with cigarette smoking the primary factor in its development.

Researchers tracked the health of more than 40,000 men who were already part of the U.S. Health Professionals Follow-up Study. The study began in 1986 and involved more than 50,000 health care professionals between 40 and 75 years old, who were surveyed every two years.

The men were asked questions about lifestyle, including smoking and exercise, diet and medical history. Dietary intake was assessed in detail every four years.

Eating patterns fell into two distinct categories: those who ate a Mediterranean-style diet rich in fruit, vegetables, whole grains and fish; and those who ate a diet Western-style diet rich in processed foods, refined sugars, and cured and red meats.

Between 1986 and 1998, 111 cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were newly diagnosed among the men in the study.

The Mediterranean diet was associated with a 50 percent lower risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease than the Western diet, even after adjusting for age, smoking, and other risk factors.

In fact, the men who ate a predominantly Western diet were more than four times as likely to develop chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, even after taking account of other influential factors.

The higher the compliance with a Mediterranean diet, the lower was the risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease over the 12-year period. Conversely, a higher compliance with the Western diet corresponded with a higher risk of developing pulmonary disease.

FOLLOW-UP STUDY

The Harvard School of Public Health began the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study in 1986. Its purpose is to evaluate a series of hypotheses about men's health relating nutritional factors to the incidence of serious illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, and other vascular diseases.

The all-male study was designed to complement the all-female Nurses' Health Study, which examines similar hypotheses. The follow-up study is sponsored by the Harvard School of Public Health and is funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and National Cancer Institute.

In the beginning, principle investigator Dr. Walter Willett, along with Dr. Meir Stampfer and colleagues, enlisted more than 50,000 male health professionals to participate in the study.

The group is composed of 29,683 dentists, 4,185 pharmacists, 3,745 optometrists, 2,220 osteopathic physicians, 1,600 podiatrists, and 10,098 veterinarians. Among the study participants are 531 African-Americans and 877 Asian-Americans.

The researchers selected health professionals in the belief that men who chose these types of careers would be motivated and committed to participating in a long-term project and would appreciate the necessity of answering survey questions accurately.

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