

What is the best diet in the world? | 2017 Newsletter

The answer is it's not a diet but a lifestyle - **The Mediterranean Lifestyle**

Fresh seasonal produce, simply prepared, served in moderate portions and enjoyed in a relaxed, social setting.

Limited packaged and processed foods, no sugar laden drinks, little if any take away food and a small glass of red wine enjoyed with the meal.

Daily exercise, walking, tending to one's vegetable garden, and minimised sitting time.

Numerous studies have found this lifestyle confers cardiovascular, and indeed many other health benefits.

The first randomised trial on the Mediterranean cuisine was conducted in Spain on over 7000 participants- PREDIMED trial. It concentrated on the therapeutic effects of eating tomatoes at least 2/week and up to 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil daily. It found these foods in conjunction with legumes, nuts and seafood (3/week), fruits, wine and less red meats, butter, margarine and sweets, lowered cardiovascular disease rates by 30 percent after 5 years. In contrast, Spaniards randomised to consume a low-fat diet had higher rates of heart disease.

All this evidence has given the Mediterranean lifestyle the highest possible NH&MRC ranking (level 1 evidence) for the prevention of chronic disease.

As a result of findings of the Seven Countries studies the Cretan Diet has become the typical Mediterranean diet comprising of:

1. Extra virgin olive oil at least 60 ml/day
2. A high intake of vegetables – 2cups daily eat at least ½ the plate vegetables at all main meals
3. Fruits 2-3 pieces daily
4. Legumes at least 2-3/week
5. Red meat in small portions and no more than 1-2/week
6. Fish 2/week and oily fish if possible
7. At least 4 serves of wholegrain breads or cereal each day
8. Nuts at least 3/week
9. Yoghurt daily and limited hard cheeses (30-40g /day)
10. Red wine in moderation 1/day 100ml and consumed with meals
11. Generous use of herbs-oregano and spices-cinnamon
12. Limited intake of sugars sweets and sweet drinks

One interesting hypothesis as to the mechanism of action of the Mediterranean diet is the effect on the gut microbiome. Increasing gut microbial diversity through a varied plant based diet and thus protecting the microbiome against the dominance of pathogens or symbiotic bacteria which in turn may be preventing and attenuating the progression of chronic diseases, especially CVD and fatty liver.

The plant based Mediterranean diet is high in both pre-and probiotics with the potential to favourably influence the gut microbiome which in turn may reduce circulating endotoxins, PS and the development of or progression of CVD risk factors. Furthermore, the diet contains foods, herbs and spices all high in polyphenols with antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties which also helps to reduce CVD risk factors. The high polyphenol intake, especially from stilbenes (grapes) and lignin's (legumes) have been shown to reduce the risk of overall mortality in subjects taking part in the PREDIMED study.

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