The Mediterranean Diet with your mouth full

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Anna Jasonides, RD, LD

Image courtesy of BROWSER on flickr.
What is it?

A food pattern shared by countries that rim the Mediterranean Sea. No official Mediterranean diet.

- Spain
- Italy
- Greece
- Turkey
- North Africa
- Israel
- Lebanon

Image courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency.
When was it coined?

1958 Ancel Keys organized 7 countries study: Finland, USA, Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, Japan.

It showed:
A lower prevalence of hypercholesterolemia and heart disease in populations of Greece and Italy especially the Greek Island of Crete, which he attributed to diet.
More studies to test hypothesis

- Framingham Heart Study
- Nurses’ Health Study
- Women’s Health Initiative

Conclusion and Discussion:
Plant fats yield better cardiovascular health than animal fats.
Review of 13 studies since 2004

- There is strong evidence that replacing saturated fats with monounsaturated fats (MUFA) is associated with reducing cardiovascular mortalities:
  - Reducing LDL Cholesterol (bad cholesterol)
  - Decrease in blood triglycerides
  - Reducing Inflammation

- Strong evidence that MUFA are associated with improving Type 2 diabetes - less insulin resistant
More Health Benefits.....

- Reduce risk of Alzheimer’s
- Reduce risk Parkinson's
- Reduce risk depression
- Reduce risk of diabetes
- Improve brain cognition
- Protect against some cancers (breast, prostate)
- Live longer
- Weight loss
Less Inflammation, Oxidative Stress with Med Diet

- Italian researchers studied the diets of 131 healthy adults, and rated each person's diet for overall adherence to a traditional Mediterranean Diet. They compared this "Mediterranean Diet Score" to blood test results of cholesterol and triglycerides, antioxidant levels, immune system function and oxidative stress. They found that those with a higher Med Diet Score had less inflammation, reduced oxidative stress, and higher circulating levels of antioxidants, all of which are associated with reduced risk of disease. [Nutrition Journal, November 16, 2011; 10(1):125 [Epub ahead of print] (Azzini et al.)]
Protective Effects of Mediterranean Diet against Prostate Cancer

- In a meta-analysis of the relationship between diet and prostate cancer, scientists in Valencia, Spain reviewed existing studies. They found that prostate cancer is reduced in men on the Mediterranean Diet compared with those on a typical Western diet. They cited several characteristics of the Med Diet, including high daily consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains, tubers and legumes; olive oil as the main source of fats; low intake of animal products; regular consumption of small fish; and small amounts of wine with meals. [Actas Urologicas Españas, September 27 2011 [Epub ahead of print]]
Eating a diet with omega-3 fatty acids can improve insulin sensitivity.

Adherence to a Mediterranean diet is associated with a reduced risk of diabetes.

Eating a Mediterranean-style diet rich in olive oil, whole grains, fish and fruit may protect aging brains from damage associated with cognitive problems.

- After reviewing brain MRI's of 712 octogenarians, researchers found that those following the Med Diet the most closely were up to 36% less likely to show brain damage from small strokes.

- Nikolaos Scarmeas, M.D, associate professor, clinical neurology, Taub Institute, Columbia University Medical Center, New York City; Connie Diekman, R.D., director, university nutrition, Washington University in St. Louis; scheduled presentation, American Academy of Neurology annual meeting, Toronto, April 10-17, 2010
Olive Oil May Be Protective Against Strokes

Older people who consume plenty of olive oil may reduce their risk of stroke by as much as 41%. That's the conclusion of researchers from the University of Bordeaux, who followed more than 7,000 people over the age of 65, in the French cities of Bordeaux, Dijon, and Montpelier, for more than five years. Compared to those who seldom or never used olive oil, those with the heaviest self-reported use of olive oil lowered their risk of suffering a stroke during the five-year duration of the study from 2.6% to 1.5% – a 41% drop.

Neurology, June 15, 2011 [Epub ahead of print]
What is it about the Mediterranean diet
Diet Characteristics of the Mediterranean

Fat: olive oil, olives, (monounsaturated fats/omega 9 oleocanthal)
Nuts, seeds, (polyunsaturated fats/omega 6)
Fish especially small fish (omega 3 fatty acids)

*Fresh* fruits and fresh vegetables are prominent

Legumes: beans, lentils, (plant protein)
Fresh herbs and spices: oregano, basil, parsley, dill, mint
Plain yogurt/cheese (fermented)
Whole grains
Red wine

Less saturated fat via meats (portion/frequency) butter, milk, cream
Less salty and sweet snack processed foods
Common Herbs and Spices

All have powerful antioxidants, vitamins, minerals
Fresh Garlic- allicin, sulfur compound
Fresh Parsley- antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins C, A
Fresh Basil
Fresh Dill
Fresh Mint
Fresh Oregano
Fresh Fennel
Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

- Visit Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust’s Mediterranean Diet Pyramid.
Mediterranean Diet Characteristics

Lifestyle and behaviors around foods

No eating / snacking in front of TV
Sharing of plates at the evening meal
Smaller plates
Main meal in day with nap after
Lots of walking
Common Food Patterns of Greece

- Real food – less fast convenience and processed foods
- No snack foods – especially packaged (chips, bars)
- Main meal is eaten in the day .... 2 pm
- Meat is smaller part of meal – one pot meals
- Lots of vegetable dishes in olive oil as main entrée
- Fruit is the dessert, no desserts after meals
- Sweets are eaten alone - afternoon and occasions not as dessert after dinner.
Common Traditional Greek Foods

- Giant baked beans (not new england style)
- Stewed green beans
- White bean soup
- Stuffed grape leaves/collard leaves (rice based)
- Baked/grilled whole fish oil/lemon (no butter, sauce)
- Boiled greens - as a side topped with oil/lemon
- Lentil soup
- Spinach Pie
Giant Baked Beans with Spinach
Braised green beans, potatoes
Braised Peas and Escarole
White bean soup
Spanish Paella
Stuffed grape leaves and squash blossoms
Greek Salad  what is different?
Caprese salad
How to get it in America?

- Cook and eat home more often.
- Eat vegetarian 1-2 times week....not isolated soy protein. Try an Mediterranean dish: falafel, hommus, bean soup
- Use extra virgin olive oil for cooking, salads, vegetables, eggs
- Steam leafy green vegies like escarole, chard, rabe add oil/lemon
- Make your own salad dressing with real olive oil.
- Reduce intake of dessert foods. Only on weekends or only on an occasion.
- Eat plain yogurt and add your own fresh fruit and honey
- Have meat be small part of the meal: stew
- Eat fish with bones small fish....smelts, sardines, anchovies
- Snack less on packaged foods bars, boxed foods. Have a handful of nuts instead, fruit, yogurt
What can you do now?

- What 1 item would you like to change about your diet that would lead you closer to a Mediterranean diet?