

Eating Like a Mediterranean

Back in the 1960s, researcher Ancel Keys organized an effort to find out, gathering data on diet and disease patterns throughout the world. The Seven Countries Study that resulted was nothing short of a watershed. It established the connection between saturated fat and heart disease, just for starters. But it also identified one of the world's healthiest eating patterns.

The study reported one of the lowest rates of heart disease, and some of the longest lifespans, in the people of Crete, an island in the Mediterranean. Later work confirmed that Cretans had much lower rates of cancer and type 2 diabetes, as well.

What was it about their lifestyle that was so protective? Lots of physical activity, for one; most of the men made their living as farmers. And Cretans ate in a way that hadn't much changed since ancient times. Their meals were full of vegetables and fruits, abundant in beans and fish, and almost devoid of red meat and processed foods. They regularly took in high amounts of fat—40 percent of daily calories—but most of it came from olive oil; their average saturated-fat intake was among the world's lowest. This eating pattern was soon christened the "Mediterranean Diet," and it still stands as one of the world's healthiest, tastiest ways to eat.

The Mediterranean pattern has stood up to clinical scrutiny as well; large-scale studies have shown that when people are put on a Mediterranean eating program, they tend to live longer and have lower rates of heart disease and some cancers, when compared with other groups following conventional eating plans.

7 guidelines for eating the Mediterranean way Eat more whole foods and fewer processed foods. Use unsaturated fats, particularly monounsaturated fats like olive oil, for cooking and flavoring foods, and for salad dressings. Eat an abundance of vegetables, especially leafy greens, every day. Eat more servings of fruits, grains and legumes than animal-based foods, and include low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Serve beans and fish as your main protein sources. Make small amounts of meat an occasional treat, rather than a daily staple. Enjoy nuts, such as almonds, peanuts and walnuts, regularly, in moderate amounts.

About the Author

http://www.eatingwell.com/health/nutrition_watch/eat_med.html

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