

Managing Editor Karl Frederick | (262) 656-6377 | kfrederick@kenoshanews.com

Mediterranean diet is a healthy choice

BY MARI SCHUH QUAM
KENOSHA NEWS CORRESPONDENT

There is now even more reason to enjoy fruits, vegetables, fish and olive oil. A study recently published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the Mediterranean diet can cut heart risks, including stroke. Experts long believed that the Mediterranean diet, full of fresh, minimally processed foods mostly from plant sources, boasted heart-healthy benefits. But the new study, conducted over five years, is the first to show a direct link.

Melissa Galich, a registered dietitian with United Hospital System in Kenosha, says she's not surprised by the study's findings because the foundation of the Mediterranean diet consists of plenty of fruits and vegetables.

"People don't realize what they eat can affect their health. Lots of things come into play, but diet definitely correlates," Galich said.



The Mediterranean eating plan consists largely of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, poultry, olive oil, seeds and nuts. It focuses on plant-based fats, so it's low in saturated fats. It advises limited use of butter, salt, red meat and sweets. All in all, it employs a healthy, doable approach to daily eating and staying active, said Jodi Fitzharris, a registered dietitian at Aurora Medical Center in Kenosha.

"With its focus on fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains, it's not that different than what I tell people for general healthy eating," she said. "It's quite practical to follow on a daily basis, as it's open to a wide variety of foods."

While the Mediterranean diet is OK for generally healthy people, people are advised to consult their doctor before starting any new eating plan.



PHOTO BY MARI SCHUH QUAM
The Mediterranean diet features eating fish and vegetables and using non-saturated fats like olive oil, and maybe enjoying a little wine.

The basics of the Mediterranean diet

Learn more about the Mediterranean diet, which has recently been shown to cut heart risks. Portion sizes are suggested amounts and may vary per person. Consult your doctor before starting any new eating plan.

- Focus on fruits, vegetables and whole grains at most meals. The fiber in these foods will fill you up and maintain blood sugar. Aim for 5-9 cups of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Use olive oil or canola oil instead of butter. Use 1-2 tablespoons of oil, which is about the size of your thumb.
- Nuts and seeds: Eat 1/4 cup a day, about the size of your palm. Try almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds.
- Fish or poultry: At least twice a week. Portion size is 3 ounces, about equal to the palm of a woman's hand.
- Flavor with herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Red meat: A few times a month. Portion size is 3 ounces, about equal to the palm of a woman's hand.
- Red wine, if appropriate. Daily limit: 5 ounces for women; 5-10 ounces for men. Consult your doctor before adding wine to your diet.
- When eating dairy, choose low-fat options.
- No more than four eggs a week.
- Maintain an active lifestyle.

The basics

To follow the Mediterranean eating plan, fill your plate with fruits, vegetables and whole grains at most meals. Aim for 5-9 cups of fruits and vegetables a day.

"Start trending toward that," Fitzharris suggests. "Start with little changes."

Bring flavor to your dishes with herbs and spices instead of salt. Put away the butter and use olive oil or canola oil. Eat a small amount of nuts and seeds every day, and when eating dairy, choose low-fat options. Opt for fish or lean protein twice a week, while red meat should be limited to just a few times a month. Such a plan is full of nutrients, says Alicia Mezera, a registered dietitian at Kindred Nursing and Rehabilitation in Kenosha.

"Following a plan that mimics this diet will be rich in antioxidants, high in fiber, low in unhealthy fats and low in sodium," she said.

Fats

The Mediterranean way of eating replaces saturated fat found in butter and red meat with heart-healthy fats found in olive oil, nuts and seeds. While people shouldn't fear fats, they do need to be aware of the amount they use, says Galich. "Fats aren't terrible. It's about the type and the portion. Fats are helpful in the right amount."

Fitzharris agrees. "Your body does need a bit of fat just to function," she said.



How to eat less

Eating plans like the Mediterranean diet are good for you, but that doesn't mean you can go hog wild. Healthy eating requires proper portions. Local dietitians share their tips on how to keep your eating under control.

- **Know when to say when.** Cancel your membership to the Clean Plate Club. If you're full, you're done. "Don't eat as much as you want, just because it's good for you," says Melissa Galich, a registered dietitian with United Hospital System. Get up and walk away. Save the leftovers for tomorrow.
- **Slow down.** The body has a 20-minute delay before it feels full. Take time to enjoy your food. Eat slowly and you'll likely eat less.
- **Drink water.** Think you're hungry? You might just be thirsty. Buy time with a tall glass of water. If you still feel hungry, load up on fruits and veggies.
- **Eat at the table.** Sit down and savor your food with family and friends. Don't scarf down food from a bag or a box while on the run.

You'll have no idea how much you actually ate.

- **Go small.** Eat from small plates. It'll trick your mind into thinking you're eating more.
- **Say no to family style.** Dish up at the kitchen counter, and then sit down for your meal. A second helping is out of sight and out of mind. Take it one step further and put the extras in the freezer right away, advises Jodi Fitzharris, a registered dietitian at Aurora Medical Center. "You're less likely to take seconds if the food is cold," she says.
- **Focus on the food.** You worked hard to make your meal, so why not enjoy it to the fullest. Turn off all the gadgets and give your attention to your meal, says Alicia Mezera, a registered dietitian at Kindred Nursing and Rehabilitation in Kenosha. "It's easy to lose track of how much you are actually eating if your mind is busy concentrating on something else," she said.
- **Read and measure.** Read nutrition labels for recommended serving sizes, then measure out your serving. "Your best bet is measuring cups and spoons," says Fitzharris.

Otherwise, use your hands as a guideline. Your fist is about one cup, while your cupped hand equals about 1/2 cup.

- **Put salad dressing on the side.** Coating your healthy salad in a sea of dressing quickly packs on the calories. Instead, keep the dressing on the side. Better yet, dip just your fork into the dressing, and then into your salad. "You'll still get a taste of dressing with every bite," says Galich.
- **Enjoy snack time.** Eat small, healthy snacks throughout the day. Small snacks keep cravings and binging at bay.
- **Write it down.** Hold yourself accountable and keep a food record of what you eat. You'll think twice before chowing on the chips. Try MyFitnessPal.com, Mezera suggests. The free calorie counter makes staying on track quick and easy.
- **Share your goals.** Let family and friends know about your healthy eating style. "The buddy system proves to be more successful than trying to do it on your own," Mezera said.

Wine

Moderate red wine consumption with meals is part of the Mediterranean lifestyle due to its beneficial antioxidants. Again, moderation is the key — suggested daily amount is only 5 ounces for women and 5-10 ounces for men. Check with your doctor before adding wine to your diet.

Mind your portions

Although Mediterranean-style

eating is heart healthy, portion control is still needed, notes Galich.

"It's not unlimited olive oil. It's not unlimited wine," she said. "Don't coat your food in olive oil, and you don't need to start drinking wine if you don't already."

Nuts and seeds have health benefits and can lower cholesterol, said Fitzharris. "But they are also high in fat and calories. So we don't want to over consume them."

A lifestyle change

The Mediterranean lifestyle includes physical activity each day as way to maintain a healthy weight to ward off disease. But staying active doesn't have to mean hitting the gym every day, according to Mezera. Try to include activity throughout your day, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Pick a distant parking spot. Take a walk instead of watching TV.

"Increase your activity that

way, and you can get in those extra steps," she said.

The lifestyle also focuses on an enjoyment of food with others, which benefits both mind and body. Slowing down the eating process can help control food consumption and also improve blood sugar, noted Fitzharris. It's all part of being aware of what you're eating and how much.

"Always be mindful," advises Galich. "There's no magic pill. There's no magic fix. It's all about how much and how often you eat."

Calcium, vitamin D pills don't prevent fractures, panel says

BY KAREN KAPLAN
LOS ANGELES TIMES

More than half of American women older than 60 take vitamin D and calcium supplements, but the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force said this week that they're probably wasting their money.

In a new recommendations from the federal government's expert panel on preventive medicine, the task force says that most post-

menopausal women should not take vitamin D and calcium to reduce their risk of bone fractures. The dosages assessed were 400 international units (IUs) of vitamin D3 and 1,000 milligrams of calcium per day.

The conclusions are based on an analysis of six randomized trials designed to study the health effects of vitamin D and calcium supplements. The largest of these trials was

the Women's Health Initiative study, which involved more than 36,000 women between the ages of 50 and 79. That study found no statistically significant difference in the risk of hip or other fractures among women taking the supplements and those who took placebos.

However, the analysis also made clear that this level of vitamin D and calcium supplementation increases

the risk of kidney stones. The added risk is small, but considering the lack of demonstrated benefits, even a small risk can't be justified, the panel said.

The task force also considered whether men and younger women should take the supplements to prevent fractures and determined that there wasn't enough clinical evidence to make a call one way or the other.

"The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined," Dr. Virginia A. Moyer wrote on behalf of the task force.

In a previous analysis, the task force found that senior citizens at increased risk for falls should take about 800 IUs of vitamin D a day. That recommendation hasn't changed.

In an editorial in *Annals*, nutrition experts Marion

Nestle of New York University and Malden Nesheim of Cornell University said the new, unambiguous recommendations should prompt doctors to think twice before advising their healthy postmenopausal patients to take calcium and vitamin D.

"In the absence of compelling evidence for benefit, taking supplements is not worth any risk, however small," they wrote.

COMING WEDNESDAY: Mangia to celebrate 25 years with food, music event