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# Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits

Mediterranean diet health benefits have had researchers spending thousands of man hours trying to understand them. Although these days, many regions of the Mediterranean have adopted a much more westernized diet habit which has resulted in a mounting obesity issue, communities who still follow the traditional Mediterranean diet continue to experience health which is the envy of the western world.

The Mediterranean diet consists primarily of fresh, healthy plant food like whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, olives, fish and seafood. They combine this with reduced amounts of red meat and dairy products. The diet is more nutritious because foods are less processed. Processing food, and even cooking it, deprives it of nutrients. But in a traditional Mediterranean diet, most foods are eaten raw or lightly cooked. When red meat is served it is often trimmed of excess fat. The overall diet provides plentiful fiber, healthy fats, vitamins, minerals, protein and essential fatty acids required by the body to maintain health and prevent chronic illnesses like heart disease and cancer.

Another notable aspect of the traditional Mediterranean diet is that not every meal contains animal flesh (i.e. meat or fish). There are commonly days with no animal flesh being consumed at all. On these days, the protein portion of the meal is derived from things like beans, peas, nuts, seeds and eggs. Although eggs are debatably still a meat product, recent research indicates that eating eggs does NOT increase blood cholesterol as scientists and doctors used to believe. Another modern day alternative to meat is tofu which comes from soy beans.

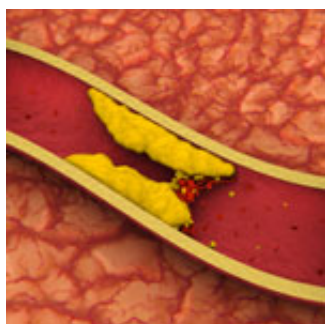
All of these things result in the Mediterranean diet being high in monounsaturated fatty acids, otherwise known as M.U.F.As which are health fats. Diets containing M.U.F.As (and polyunsaturated fats, or P.U.F.As) as opposed to saturated and trans fats, tend to provide certain health benefits including reduced risk of;

- Heart disease
- High Cholesterol
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Type II Diabetes
- Parkinsons Disease
- Alzheimers
- Depression
- Metabolic syndrome

Lets take a closer at these.

## **Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits**

Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of heart disease and high Cholesterol



High levels of saturated fats result in increased cholesterol in the bloodstream. Over time, the cholesterol attaches to the walls of arteries causing a narrowing of the arteries that can lead to blockages (like in the picture to the right), heart attacks and heart disease. Quite clearly, the reduced amount of saturated fat in traditional Mediterranean diets results in lower cholesterol levels. In some cases, high cholesterol is hereditary and is caused by the liver producing too much. A healthy diet containing high amounts of Omega 3 fatty acids is proven to actively combat this issue and can have a significant lowering effect on cholesterol levels. (See Reference 1)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of Stroke

A Columbia University Medical Center study in which researchers followed 712 participants over a six year period discovered that participants who followed a moderate [Mediterranean diet](#) were 21% less likely to experience a stroke. Participants who followed a strict diet were 36% less likely to experience a stroke. (See Reference 2)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of cancer

According to a study by the Department of Clinical Sciences, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain: "There is a 'probable' protective role of the Mediterranean diet toward cancer in general." A National Cancer institute study of 500,000 people found that people who consumed more than 4 oz (113g) of red meat daily were 30% more likely to die from ANY cause over 10 years than those who consumed less. Sausages and processed meats increased the risk even more. (See Reference 3)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of Diabetes

Consumption of complex carbohydrates and high fiber foods reduces the Glycemic Index of foods and low GI foods prevent spikes in blood sugar levels. So a low GI diet such as the Mediterranean diet tends to prevent diabetes... See the section on Metabolic syndrome below (See Reference 1 & 6)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of Parkinsons & Alzheimers

Some studies indicate that people who adhere to the Mediterranean diet have lower rates of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. Researchers are unsure why this is the case but they believe that healthy food choices improving cholesterol, blood sugar levels and blood vessel health may be the cause. (See Reference 4)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of Depression

British Researchers studied depression and diet in more than 3,000 middle-aged office workers for five years. Their findings indicated that people who ate a diet high in processed meat, chocolate, sugar, fried food, refined cereals and high-fat dairy products — were more likely to suffer depression. But people who ate a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fish similar to a Mediterranean diet were less likely to suffer depression. Their findings support other research that has found that healthy diets can protect against disease. (See Reference 5)

### Mediterranean Diet Health Benefits - Reduced risk of Metabolic syndrome

Many overweight and obese people suffer from a condition called Metabolic Syndrome. Metabolic syndrome is a group of conditions — high blood pressure, a abnormal blood sugar levels, excessive body fat around the waist or abnormal cholesterol levels — that occur together. These increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. People on the Mediterranean diet have been found to be less likely to be overweight, thus reducing incidence of this condition. (See Reference 6)

### References

1. [Mayo Clinic - Mediterranean diet: Choose this heart-healthy diet option](#)
2. [ABC News - Mediterranean Diet May Be Key To Avoiding Stroke, Dementia](#)
3. [PubMed - Association between the Mediterranean diet and cancer risk](#)
4. [Mayo Clinic - Can a Mediterranean diet lower my risk of Alzheimer's?](#)
5. [Mayo Clinic - Are depression and diet related?](#)
6. [Mayo Clinic - Metabolic syndrome](#)

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