

Real Common Sense

January 2023

Improving the Mediterranean Diet

Hello, this is Dr. Ellen. In this month's 'Real Common Sense' newsletter, I want to write about a diet that has received perhaps the most attention by the healthcare community over the past few decades, namely, the Mediterranean diet. It has been studied widely and accepted as a healthy dietary alternative. I would certainly agree that the Mediterranean diet is a definite improvement over the standard American diet (SAD). I want to review some of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and, if you follow it, how you may improve upon it.

By the way, if you didn't get a chance to see my previous newsletters, you can find them on my new website, www.drellencutler.com under 'Media'.

What is the Mediterranean Diet?

The Mediterranean diet is based on the various foods that were traditionally eaten in southern European countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. It has been recommended to improve overall health and help prevent chronic diseases. The diet encourages the consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and extra virgin olive oil as well as fish and seafood. It allows moderate amounts of poultry, eggs, and dairy (cheese, yogurt, milk). Restricted foods include red meat, processed foods, added sugar, and refined grains and oils.⁽¹⁾

What are the Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet?

A number of studies have demonstrated that the Mediterranean diet can have beneficial effects in supporting overall health and in particular improving blood sugar levels as well as protecting heart health and brain function.⁽¹⁾ Adherence to the Mediterranean diet has been positively associated with preserved memory performance and inversely associated with pathologic biomarkers of Alzheimer's disease.⁽²⁾ This dietary approach has been found to help prevent a number of chronic and potentially life-threatening diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, atrial fibrillation, and breast cancer.⁽³⁾ A Mediterranean diet can also help reduce body weight over an extended period of time, especially when it is energy restricted and combined with physical activity.⁽⁴⁾

Improving upon the Mediterranean diet

In my many years of clinical practice, the dietary plan I have recommended to my patients has usually been a whole food plant-based diet. I have had a number of patients who were already on, or had been on, a Mediterranean diet, often to improve their overall health or help with weight loss. For most, I recommended they gradually change to a whole food plant-based diet. This was typically well tolerated and brought with it positive benefits. It was generally met with an improvement in their overall sense of wellbeing as well as an additional weight loss. Interestingly, my testing often suggested that they felt better at least in part because of a reduction in specific food and other sensitivities.

Several studies have been done on both the Mediterranean diet and plant-based diets to evaluate their health benefits. Both diets appear to benefit heart health and help prevent heart disease, with plant-based diets being more effective at reducing total and LDL cholesterol. Both seem to have positive effects on brain function (though more studies have been done to evaluate the effects of a Mediterranean diet on brain health). Both have been shown to lower the risk of type 2 diabetes. And several studies comparing the two dietary patterns on weight loss tended to show greater effectiveness with the plant-based approach.⁽⁵⁾

An interesting study released last year focused on the reduction of visceral abdominal fat (VAT) when comparing a Mediterranean (MED) diet to a 'greener' version of that diet over an 18-month period. The differences were that the 'green-MED diet' added 3-4 cups of green tea and 100 grams of frozen cubes of a green, high plant protein shake per day as well as further reducing red and processed meat consumption. The green-MED diet achieved more than twice the degree of VAT reduction, despite similar weight loss.⁽⁶⁾ In another study, after 36-weeks, the trial showed that a low-fat plant-based diet reduced body weight, fat mass, and visceral fat, increased insulin sensitivity, and improved blood lipids, when compared with a Mediterranean diet.⁽⁷⁾

I have found that making the Mediterranean diet 'greener' by replacing animal protein with that from plant sources is superior for most people looking to improve their health and sense of wellbeing. In fact, making the dietary pattern as similar as possible to a whole food plant-based diet is typically the optimal goal. Thus, the less processed the foods of any variety, the better. Also, supplementation and/or focusing on plant-based sources may be warranted for some nutrients, including vitamins D3 and B12, omega 3 fatty acids EPA and DHA (plant-based), and calcium.⁽⁸⁾ For more information on being vegan, please see my June 2022 Newsletter, "Why Vegan?"⁽⁹⁾

Using the Ellen Cutler Method (ECM)

When using ECM energetic testing, I can identify the optimal lifestyle modifications and supplementation for each person. I can also determine the obstructing sensitivities in that individual and then use ECM to energetically desensitize those issues. I have found this to be the best, most successful way of achieving optimal improvements in wellness. Nonetheless, I

have found that a whole food plant-based diet is best to maximize the health and wellness of most individuals. For those wanting to choose a Mediterranean diet, I would have to say, “the greener, the better”.

So, be well, be healthy, and remember...

“No disease that can be treated by diet should be treated with any other means.”

— Maimonides

Dr. Ellen

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4. “Mediterranean diet and weight loss: meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials” at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK81688/>
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8. “Optimum Nutrition Recommendations” at <https://nutritionfacts.org/2011/09/12/dr-gregers-2011-optimum-nutrition-recommendations/>
9. June 2022 Newsletter – “Why Vegan?” at <https://drellencutler.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-June-Newsletter.docx.pdf>

“Mediterranean Diet 101: A Meal Plan and Beginner’s Guide” at <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/mediterranean-diet-meal-plan> - has food lists, etc.

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