

Mediterranean diet: A heart-healthy plan for life

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The Mediterranean diet has proven beneficial effects not only regarding metabolic syndrome, but also on its individual components including waist circumference, HDL-cholesterol levels, triglycerides levels, blood pressure levels and glucose metabolism, according to a new study published in the March 15, 2011, issue of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. The study is a meta-analysis, including results of 50 studies on the Mediterranean diet, with an overall studied population of about half a million subjects.

"The prevalence of the metabolic syndrome is increasing rapidly throughout the world, in parallel with the increasing incidence of diabetes and obesity, and is now considered a major public health problem," said lead investigator Demosthenes Panagiotakos, Ph.D., associate professor in Biostatistics-Epidemiology of Nutrition, Department of Science of Dietetics - Nutrition, Harokopio University of Athens. "Additionally, the metabolic syndrome is one of the main causes of cardiovascular disease (directly or indirectly), associated with personal and socio-economic burdens. As a result, prevention of this condition is of considerable importance."

The [Mediterranean diet](#) is a [dietary pattern](#) characterized by high consumption of monounsaturated fatty acids, primarily from olives and olive oils; daily consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals, and low-fat dairy products; weekly consumption of fish, poultry, tree nuts, and legumes; a relatively low consumption of red meat; and a moderate daily consumption of alcohol, normally with meals.

The Mediterranean diet, according to Dr. Panagiotakos and Christina-Maria Kastorini, MSc, Ph.D. cand., is one of the best-known and well-studied dietary patterns, which has been shown to be associated with decreased mortality from all causes, lower risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. Additionally, it has a beneficial effect on abdominal obesity, lipids levels, [glucose metabolism](#) and blood pressure levels, which are also risk factors for the development of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects of the Mediterranean diet as a whole, as well as the effects of the individual components of the diet, and especially olive oil, fruits and vegetables, whole grains and fish, also confer to the beneficial role of this pattern.

"To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first work that has systematically assessed, through a large meta-analysis, the role of the Mediterranean diet on metabolic syndrome and its components," he said. "Our results add to the existing knowledge, and further demonstrate the protective role and the significance that lifestyle factors, and mainly dietary habits, have when it comes to the development and progression of the metabolic syndrome."

Encouraging adherence to a healthy dietary pattern like the Mediterranean diet, as well as the adoption of an active lifestyle, seems to be a cornerstone in developing public health strategies for the prevention of the metabolic syndrome, Dr. Panagiotakos suggested. Taking into account the limited financial resources many countries face in the 21st century, better eating seems to be an effective and affordable means for preventing cardiovascular diseases, at the population level, he suggested. In addition to its various health benefits, this dietary pattern can be easily adopted by all populations and various cultures.

Provided by American College of Cardiology

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