

Sea diet and siesta point to Greek island longevity: study

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Siestas, a health diet -- and genetics -- could explain why people on the tiny Aegean island of Ikaria live so long, said a study by Greek cardiologists released Wednesday.

"While in the rest of Europe only 0.1 percent of the population is over 90 years old, in Ikaria the figure is tenfold, 1.1 percent," Christina Chrysohoou, a cardiologist at the Athens university school of medicine, told AFP.

The study was conducted from June to October 2009 on over 1,400 of the island's some 8,000 residents, divided into elderly and middle-aged groups and assessing lifestyle, diet, clinical and other factors.

Thirteen percent of those polled were over 80 years old, while 1.6 percent of men and 1.1 percent of women were over 90.

"Fish, fruit, vegetables, legumes and tea shield the [cardiovascular system](#). Moreover, daily use of olive oil is beneficial to [sexual activity](#) and, if added to the moderate consumption of coffee in the afternoon 'siesta', form the ingredients that may compose the secret of longevity," the researchers said.

The study found that the elderly had healthier [eating habits](#) and took midday naps more regularly than younger islanders, presenting lower depression rates.

And although the risks of [high blood pressure](#), cholesterol or diabetes are the same as in other parts of Greece, they manifest much later among Ikarians, said professor Christos Pitsavos, a co-author of the study.

Pitsavos added that [genetic background](#) could also explain the results.

"What's interesting is to see that the parents of people participating in the study had also lived long lives.

"On average they died between the ages of 67 and 80 when elsewhere in Greece at the time it was 50-55," he told reporters.

Daily physical activity also seems to be associated with lower incidence of cardiovascular disease, which causes 42 percent of deaths in the European Union and costs 169 billion euros (\$241 billion) a year, the team said.

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