

# Age-proof diet for longevity

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Credit: Sheila

By studying the molecular mechanism of food nutrients from a Mediterranean diet in an elderly population, scientists hope to help countering their physical and mental decline.

We are what we eat. However, little is known on how a specific dietary regime can impact the life of the elderly. Now, researchers from an EU funded project called NU-AGE are investigating the effects of the Mediterranean diet on older people. Their aim is to get clues on how to counteract physical and [cognitive decline](#) through diet changes.

Starting in July 2013, the project will study how the Mediterranean diet regime affects people over 65 years old by focusing on 1,250 volunteers; the largest study of its kind to date. Half of them will constitute a control group. The other half will receive the classic Mediterranean diet, rich in

olive oil, [fresh fruits and vegetables](#). At different stages during this year-long study on diet change, researchers will collect blood samples to investigate its effects at the cellular and molecular level.

"The Mediterranean diet is well known for being balanced", says Aurelia Santoro, immunologist at the University of Bologna, Italy, and NU-AGE scientific manager, "but we do not exactly know how micro-nutrients, such as vitamins and phenols, affect [molecular mechanisms](#)". Until now, scientists knew that nutrients such as polyphenols or carotenoids, contained in vegetables, have antioxidant properties, but did not know exactly how these bringing health benefits at the molecular level.

Some experts welcome this much needed project in the context of an ageing [European population](#), prone to neuronal degeneration and its devastating cognitive consequences. "More work is needed on nutrition in the elderly, in term of needs assessment, potentially identifying nutrient imbalances that are involved in neuro-degeneration", says Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development at [World Health Organization](#) in Geneva. This means this project may be one of many more future studies that may be required before effective solutions to tackle the needs of the elderly become available.

Once further work on molecular level mechanisms bring answers, the project will also attempt to design new functional food focused on the specific needs of the elderly. This will be done in collaboration with the food industry. Such functional food could help to counteract the lack of specific micro-nutrients.

But functional food supplements are not the only option. Indeed, some experts do not believe that providing food supplements are the way to go. Instead, home cooking sometimes provides all the nutrients that are needed. Gianna Ferretti from the Nutrition Science School of Università

Politecnica delle Marche, in Ancona, Italy, tells youris.com: "[previous] research has showed that traditional food, especially from [Mediterranean diet](#), have positive effects on psychological and physical health and can help in protecting from several diseases."

**More information:** [www.nu-age.eu/](http://www.nu-age.eu/)

Source: Youris.com

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