

Mediterranean diets have lasting health benefits

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Credit: Wikipedia.

The health benefits of switching to a Mediterranean style diet and upping the amount of time spent exercising for a period of just eight weeks can still be seen a year after stopping the regime, a new study has shown.

The research by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Lincoln in the UK revealed that the [diet](#) and [exercise](#) combination leads to improved blood flow in cells in the inner lining of the blood vessels – called the [endothelial cells](#) – a full 12 months after completing participation in the intervention programme.

Endothelial cells line the interior of the entire vascular system of the human body – from the large arteries to the smallest capillaries – and improvements in their function could reduce the risk of people

developing cardiovascular disease, the study said.

Researchers believe the long-term health benefits observed after such a short intervention could be due to molecular changes associated with the Mediterranean diet. Traditional Mediterranean cuisine is based on olive oil, fruit, vegetables and salad, fish, legumes, wholegrain foods, wine and limited consumption of red meat.

Lead researcher Dr Markos Klonizakis, a Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, said: "Preserving a patient's endothelial function as they get older is thought to reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, so these findings are very encouraging.

"Although exercise on its own can be beneficial, other lifestyle factors such as nutrition play an important role as well.

"Considering the scientific evidence already out there that a Mediterranean diet offers health benefits, it made sense to examine how such a diet, when combined with exercise, could affect the small veins of our body due to their important role in our overall well-being, in the longer-term."

The study focused on healthy people over the age of 50. Participants were originally assessed over an eight-week period. One group was encouraged to eat more vegetables, fruit, [olive oil](#), tree nuts and fresh oily fish, as well as take up a moderate exercise regime, while the other just took up exercise alone.

The results showed more health improvements in the Mediterranean diet group than the exercise only group, which one year later, were still evident despite the lifestyle changes implemented during the study no longer being carefully followed.

Co-researcher Geoff Middleton, Senior Lecturer in the School of Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Lincoln, added: "With cardiovascular disease being on the rise, adding a huge burden to healthcare systems around the globe, it is important to find ways to reduce the number of cases. Even a medium-duration intervention with a Mediterranean diet and exercise regime can promise long-term [health benefits](#), especially in people at high risk of developing [cardiovascular disease](#)."

The paper, Long-term effects of an exercise and Mediterranean diet intervention in the vascular function of an older, healthy population, was published in the journal *Microvascular Research*.

More information: "Markos Klonizakis, Ahmad Alkhatib, and Geoff Middleton; Long-term effects of an exercise and Mediterranean diet intervention in the vascular function of an older, healthy population." *Microvascular Research*. 2014 Sep;95:103-7;. [DOI: 10.1016/j.mvr.2014.07.015](#)

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