

Study finds that Nordic diet lowers cholesterol and blood sugar, even if you don't lose weight

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A healthy Nordic diet can prevent a range of diseases. Until now, the health benefits that researchers had attributed to a Nordic diet primarily

focused on weight loss. But in a new study, University of Copenhagen researchers and their Nordic colleagues found clear evidence that a Nordic diet can lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels even without weight loss. In particular, they point to the composition of dietary fats as a possible explanation for the diet's positive effects.

Berries, veggies, [fish](#), whole grains and rapeseed oil: These are the main ingredients of the Nordic diet concept that for the past decade, has been recognized as extremely healthy, tasty and sustainable. The diet can prevent obesity and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Until now, Nordic diet research has primarily been linked to the diet's positive health effect following weight loss. But a new analysis conducted by University of Copenhagen researchers, among others, makes it clear that a Nordic diet has positive health benefits, regardless of whether one loses weight or not.

"It's surprising because most people believe that positive effects on [blood sugar](#) and cholesterol are solely due to weight loss. Here, we have found this not to be the the case. Other mechanisms are also at play," explains Lars Ove Dragsted, a researcher and head of section at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports.

Together with researchers from Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, Dragsted examined blood and urine samples from 200 people over the age of 50, all with elevated BMI and increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The participants were divided into two groups—one provided foods according to Nordic dietary recommendations and a control group on their habitual diet. After six months of monitoring, the result was clear.

"The group that had been on the Nordic diet for six months became significantly healthier, with lower [cholesterol levels](#), lower overall levels of both saturated and unsaturated fat in the blood, and better regulation of glucose, compared to the control group. We kept the group on the Nordic diet weight-stable, meaning that we asked them to eat more if they lost weight. Even without weight loss, we could see an improvement in their health," explains Lars Ove Dragsted.

The fat makes us healthy

Instead of weight loss alone, the researchers point to the unique composition of fats in a Nordic diet as a possible explanation for the significant health benefits.

"By analyzing the blood of participants, we could see that those who benefited most from the dietary change had different fat-soluble substances than the control group. These are substances that appear to be linked to unsaturated fatty acids from oils in the Nordic diet. This is a sign that Nordic dietary fats probably play the most significant role for the health effects seen here, which I hadn't expected," says Lars Ove Dragsted.

Fats in the Nordic diet come from fish, flaxseeds, sunflower and [rapeseed](#), among other things. As a whole, they constitute a highly beneficial mix for the body, although the researchers have yet to accurately explain why these fats seem to lower both blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

"We can only speculate as to why a change in fat composition benefits our health so greatly. However, we can confirm that the absence of highly processed food and less saturated fats from animals have a very positive effect on us. So, the fat composition in the Nordic diet, which is higher in omega-3 and omega-6 [unsaturated fats](#), is probably a

considerable part of the explanation for the health effects we find from the Nordic diet, even when the weight of participants remains constant," concludes Lars Ove Dragsted.

More information: Gözde Gürdeniz et al, Analysis of the SYSDIET Healthy Nordic Diet randomized trial based on metabolic profiling reveal beneficial effects on glucose metabolism and blood lipids, *Clinical Nutrition* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.clnu.2021.12.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2021.12.031)

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