

Research finds Mediterranean diet not only boosts health, but also improves fertility

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With an emphasis on fruits, vegetables and legumes, the Mediterranean diet has long been applauded for its multiple health benefits. Now, new research shows that it may also help overcome infertility, making it a non-intrusive and affordable strategy for couples trying to conceive.

Conducted by Monash University, the University of the Sunshine Coast, and the University of South Australia, the review found that the Mediterranean diet can improve fertility, assisted reproductive technology (ART) success, and sperm quality in men.

The paper is published in the journal *Nutrients*.

Specifically, researchers identified that the anti-inflammatory properties of a Mediterranean diet can improve couples' chances of conception.

Infertility is a global health concern affecting 48 million couples and 186 million individuals worldwide.

UniSA researcher, Dr. Evangeline Mantzioris, says modifying preconception nutrition is a non-invasive and potentially effective means for improving fertility outcomes.

"Deciding to have a baby is one of life's biggest decisions, but if things don't go as planned, it can be very stressful for both partners," Dr. Mantzioris says.

"Research shows inflammation can affect fertility for both men and women, affecting sperm quality, [menstrual cycles](#), and implantation. So, in this study we wanted to see how a diet that reduces inflammation—such as the Mediterranean diet—might improve fertility outcomes.

"Encouragingly, we found consistent evidence that by adhering to an anti-inflammatory diet—one that includes lots of polyunsaturated or 'healthy' fats, flavonoids (such as leafy green vegetables), and a limited amount of red and processed meat—we can improve fertility."

The Mediterranean diet is primarily plant-based, and includes [whole](#)

[grains](#), [extra virgin olive oil](#), fruits, vegetables, beans and legumes, nuts, herbs, and spices. Yogurt, cheese, and lean protein sources such as fish, chicken, or eggs; red and processed meats are only eaten in small amounts.

In comparison, a western diet comprises excessive saturated fats, refined carbohydrates, and animal proteins, making it energy-dense and lacking dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Typically, a [western diet](#) is associated with higher levels of inflammation.

Monash University researcher, Simon Alesi, says understanding the association between anti-inflammatory diets such as the Mediterranean diet, and fertility, could be a gamechanger for couples hoping to start a family.

"The Mediterranean diet is consistently ranked among the healthiest diets in the world. But knowing that it may also boost your chances of conceiving and having a baby is extremely promising," Alesi says.

"Modifying your diet is a non-intrusive and affordable strategy that could potentially improve infertility.

"Of course, more research needs to be done, but at the very least, shifting to a Mediterranean [diet](#) will not only improve your overall health, but also your chances of conceiving."

More information: Simon Alesi et al, Anti-Inflammatory Diets in Fertility: An Evidence Review, *Nutrients* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/nu14193914](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14193914)

Provided by University of South Australia

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