

A Mediterranean diet can ease symptoms of stress and anxiety, says study

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It's no secret that the Mediterranean diet is good for your health. Already recommended to reduce the risks of bowel cancer, heart disease, and dementia, new [research](#) from the University of South Australia published in the journal *Nutrients* shows that the Mediterranean diet can also reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Conducted in partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast, researchers assessed the impact of a Mediterranean diet on mental health among 294 older Australians (aged 60+) finding that it reduced the severity of anxiety and stress, independent of age, gender, sleep, and BMI.

Additionally, they identified that specific elements of the diet—fruit, nuts, legumes, and a low consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks (less than 250 mL per day)—reduced the severity of anxiety and stress.

Globally, anxiety is the most common mental health disorder affecting more than 301 million people. In Australia, 1 in 4 people will experience anxiety during their lifetime.

Leading dietitian and UniSA researcher Dr. Evangeline Mantzioris says that the Mediterranean diet can play a significant role in improving mental health and quality of life.

"Globally, we're facing an unprecedented aging population, yet despite this longevity, many people continue to struggle with their health and well-being," Dr. Mantzioris says.

"Lifestyle behaviors, including diet quality, are gaining more attention as [modifiable risk factors](#) for poor [mental health](#), with the Mediterranean diet endorsed for reducing chronic disease risk and supporting healthy

aging.

"In this study we showed that when older people adhered to a Mediterranean diet, their symptoms of stress and anxiety declined—and that this occurred regardless of their age, gender, BMI or how much sleep and exercise they were getting.

"It's a big tick for the Mediterranean diet—through a relatively easy lifestyle change, people can markedly improve their stress and [anxiety](#) levels—who wouldn't want to give it a go."

A Mediterranean diet includes plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrains and seeds, nuts, legumes, and olive oil. Fish and seafood should be incorporated at least twice a week, while dairy and lean proteins can be eaten daily in smaller portions. The diet encourages infrequent consumption of red meats and processed foods.

More information: Lisa Allcock et al, Adherence to a Mediterranean Diet Is Inversely Associated with Anxiety and Stress but Not Depression: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Community-Dwelling Older Australians, *Nutrients* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/nu16030366](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu16030366)

Provided by University of South Australia

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