

# Mediterranean diet linked to lower risk of mortality, especially from cardiovascular disease, in cancer survivors

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The Mediterranean diet is a powerful ally for health even after a cancer diagnosis. This is the key result of an Italian study carried out as part of the UMBERTO Project, conducted by the Joint Research Platform

Umberto Veronesi Foundation—Department of Epidemiology and Prevention of the I.R.C.C.S. Neuromed of Pozzilli, in collaboration with the LUM "Giuseppe Degennaro" University of Casamassima (BA).

According to this research, people diagnosed with any type of tumor, who had a high adherence to the Mediterranean diet in the year preceding their enrollment into the study, live longer and have a reduced risk of cardiovascular mortality, compared to those with lower adherence to this diet.

The study, published in *JACC CardioOncology*, examined 800 Italian adults, both men and women, who had already been diagnosed with cancer at the time of enrollment in the Moli-sani Study, between 2005 and 2010. Participants were followed for over 13 years, and detailed information on their [food consumption](#) during the year before enrollment was available for all of them.

"The beneficial role of the Mediterranean diet in primary prevention of some tumors is well known in the literature," says Marialaura Bonaccio, first author of the study and Co-Principal Investigator of the Joint Research Platform at the Department of Epidemiology and Prevention of the IRCCS Neuromed.

"However, little is known about the [potential benefits](#) that this dietary model can have for those who have already received a [cancer diagnosis](#)."

Considering that the number of cancer survivors is expected to increase in the coming years, possibly due to targeted and effective therapies, it is crucial to understand the extent to which a healthy diet can prolong survival. This is why Italian researchers examined the role of the Mediterranean diet in relation to mortality in people who already had a history of cancer at time of enrollment into the Moli-sani study, one of the largest population cohorts in Europe.

"The results of our study indicate that people who had cancer and reported a high adherence to a Mediterranean way of eating had a 32% lower risk of mortality compared to participants who did not follow the Mediterranean diet. The benefit was particularly evident for cardiovascular mortality, which was reduced by 60%," continues Bonaccio.

"These data support an interesting hypothesis that different chronic diseases, such as tumors and heart diseases, actually share the same [molecular mechanisms](#). This is known in the literature as 'common soil,' namely a common ground from which these two groups of disorders originate," said Maria Benedetta Donati, Principal Investigator of the Joint Platform.

"The Mediterranean diet is mostly composed of foods such as fruit, vegetables and [olive oil](#), that are natural sources of antioxidant compounds, which could explain the advantage observed in terms of mortality not only from cancer, but also from cardiovascular diseases, that can be reduced by diets particularly rich in these [bioactive compounds](#)," explains Chiara Tonelli, President of the Scientific Committee of the Umberto Veronesi Foundation.

"The UMBERTO Project is therefore oriented to increase knowledge of the mechanisms, in order to clarify the benefits of this dietary model also for more vulnerable population groups, such as cancer survivors."

**More information:** Mediterranean diet Is associated with lower all-cause and cardiovascular mortality among long-term cancer survivors, *JACC CardioOncology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jacc.2024.05.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2024.05.012)

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