

Mediterranean diet may lower risk of brain damage that causes thinking problems

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A Mediterranean diet may help people avoid the small areas of brain damage that can lead to problems with thinking and memory, according to a study released today that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 62nd Annual Meeting in Toronto April 10 to April 17, 2010.

The study found that people who ate a Mediterranean-like diet were less likely to have brain infarcts, or small areas of dead tissue linked to thinking problems.

The Mediterranean diet includes high intake of vegetables, legumes, fruits, cereals, fish and monounsaturated fatty acids such as [olive oil](#); low intake of saturated fatty acids, [dairy products](#), meat and poultry; and mild to moderate amounts of alcohol.

For the study, researchers assessed the diets of 712 people in New York and divided them into three groups based on how closely they were following the Mediterranean diet. Then they conducted [MRI](#) brain scans of the people an average of six years later. A total of 238 people had at least one area of brain damage.

Those who were most closely following a Mediterranean-like diet were 36 percent less likely to have areas of brain damage than those who were least following the diet. Those moderately following the diet were 21 percent less likely to have brain damage than the lowest group.

"The relationship between this type of [brain damage](#) and the [Mediterranean diet](#) was comparable with that of [high blood pressure](#)," said study author Nikolaos Scarmeas, MD, MSc, of Columbia University Medical Center in New York and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "In this study, not eating a Mediterranean-like diet had about the same effect on the brain as having high blood pressure."

Previous research by Scarmeas and his colleagues showed that a Mediterranean-like diet may be associated with a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease and may lengthen survival in people with Alzheimer's disease. According to the present study, these associations may be partially explained by fewer brain infarcts.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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