

The Mediterranean Diet

This healthy style of eating has been called "THE MIRACLE DIET" by the Health Report for the AARP. Although, I think this is almost true, I take issue with calling this tasty traditional way of eating a "diet". Most people consider a diet a plan they follow for a while, for a particular purpose, usually for weight loss. You usually go "on" a diet and then "off." And that is precisely why "diets" don't work. Whether you are changing the way you eat for weight loss or for therapeutic nutritional treatment for a disease or condition, if it is an effective, healthy plan, it should be adopted for a lifetime.

Americans have strayed from the ethnic roots of their cuisine and moved towards the Western fast food way of eating with disastrous results that are evident in every age group. Many studies have proven the benefits of adopting the Mediterranean style of eating.

Most people think about Italy and Greece when the Mediterranean influence is considered. We tend to forget that the other countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea include Spain, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt, as well as Italy and Greece. All cuisines have distinctive differences but all share common components in general.

The important components of the Mediterranean Diet are:

Fish and fish oil

Olives and olive oil

Nuts and legumes

Red wine

Whole grains

Fruits and vegetables.

The exclusion of trans fats.

The changes seen in health by "Mediterraneanizing" our diet are largely a result of the healthy fat in the foods listed above. The mono-unsaturated and poly-unsaturated fats in fish, olives, nuts, and whole grains can alter the amount of cholesterol, the type of cholesterol and the size of the fat particles that float through the circulation. A more favorable lipid profile lowers the risk for heart disease.

Fish oil is, by far, the most important of the oils. While eating fish in place of meat reduces the overall amount of fat consumed, it is making a difference in many ways. An improvement in the lipid profile, raising the HDL, lowering the LDL, Triglycerides, and total cholesterol protects against heart disease.

Omega-3 fat from marine life changes the body's production of inflammatory chemistry reducing pain of all types, especially arthritis. Inflammation is involved in all disease. Inflammation is soon to be the "buzz word" in the health arena for 2008.

The fiber from the legumes and whole grains help stabilize blood sugar levels and lower artery-clogging LDL cholesterol. Fruits and vegetables also provide a wide range of phytonutrients that aren't found in other foods. These are potent nutrients that fight cancer, slow the aging process, and keep the brain functioning optimally.

Red wine has beneficial properties that also change the lipid profile by increasing the "Healthy" HDL lipids that have a protective effect for the heart by taking the extra fat and cholesterol out of the blood stream and back to the liver for processing. Of course, moderate alcohol consumption is recommended for those without problems associated with alcohol such as liver disease or alcoholism.

Adopting some of the basic changes can make a difference. In future newsletters there will be more discussion about the specific components of the Mediterranean diet with wonderful, simple recipes to include in your menus for you and your family.