

Health Literacy

Mediterranean Diet now for better health later.

Convincing evidence published in 2013 has shown that a Mediterranean diet is effective at warding off heart attack, stroke, and premature death. While you probably get the biggest payoff by adopting such a diet early in life, a new study shows that doing so during midlife serves a good purpose.

Researchers studied the dietary habits of more than 10,000 women in their 50s and 60s and compared them to how the women felt fifteen years later. Women who followed a healthy diet during middle age were 40% more likely to live past 70 without chronic illness and without physical or mental problems with those that ate a less healthy diet. The healthiest women were the ones who ate more plant foods, whole grains, fish, less red and processed meat and limited alcohol intake.

How can your diet in middle age protect your health in later life? Several reasons may be involved, including lower inflammation and oxidative stress, both within the nervous system. These are the two pathways underlying many age-related chronic diseases and health conditions such as age-related brain diseases and mental health. Other mechanisms include improving glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity, explains Cecillia Samieri, researcher at Universite Bordeaux in France who also studied at Harvard Medical School.

Good food is a tremendous health booster. Whole grains, legumes, fruit, and vegetables are packed with fiber to slow down digestion and help control blood sugar. The monounsaturated fats in olive oil, nuts, and fish can have anti-inflammatory effects and may help ward off heart disease and many other conditions.

Gradually over weeks and months, your new eating lifestyle can become a habit and not a fad. Permanent lifestyle change in midlife will help you to the goal of good health in old age.