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More support for Med diet's heart benefits

By Stephen Daniells

03/07/2007 - **Consuming a Mediterranean-style diet, rich in fruit, vegetables and fish, may decrease oxidative damage to LDL cholesterol and protect against coronary heart disease, suggests a new study.**

The research, published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, adds to an ever-growing list of research supporting the health benefits of consuming a traditional [Mediterranean diet](#) (TMD), with evidence linking the diet to lower incidence of heart disease, obesity and certain types of cancers.

"We also know that the Mediterranean diet is rich in fruits and vegetables and consequently rich in antioxidants, and a lot of people simply figured that it would be beneficial," said Ramon Estruch, from the Service of Internal Medicine at Hospital Clinic, Barcelona.

"But nobody has tested the antioxidant effects of this dietary pattern in a randomized trial. This is one of the reasons we started the study," he added.

Heart disease causes almost 50 per cent of deaths in Europe, and is reported to cost the EU economy an estimated €169 billion (£116 billion) per year.

The Prevencion con Dieta Mediterranea (PREDIMED) study assigned 372 subjects at high cardiovascular risk (average age 67.8, 210 women), and randomly assigned them to a low-fat diet or one of 2 TMDs (TMD plus virgin [olive oil](#) or TMD plus nuts) in a controlled, parallel-group trial for three months.

After the 3-month interventions, the researchers found that consumption of the olive oil Med diet led to reduction in levels of oxidised LDL by 10.6 units per litre, while the nut-rich Med diet led to reduction of 7.3 unit per litre.

Oxidation of LDLs is thought to play an important role in the development of atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. Increasing LDL's resistance to oxidation is thought to possibly delay the progression of the disease.

"The present study is, to our knowledge, the first randomized controlled clinical trial focused on the effect of a Mediterranean type diet on in vivo LDL oxidation," wrote the authors.

Decreases in systolic and diastolic blood pressures occurred as a result of both TMD diets. The researchers add that consumption of the TMD plus [nuts](#) led to a reduction in triglyceride level and an increase in HDL cholesterol levels.

"Individuals at high cardiovascular risk who improved their diet toward a TMD pattern showed significant reductions in cellular lipid levels and LDL oxidation," wrote lead author Montserrat Fito from Barcelona's Institut Municipal d'Investigacio Medica.

"Results provide further evidence to recommend the TMD as a useful tool against risk factors for CHD," added Fito.

Given these results, Dr Estruch said: "It's easy to foresee that the participants who follow the Mediterranean diet supplemented with olive oil or with nuts will show in the long run a 50 per cent reduction in the incidence of cardiovascular complications."

PREDIMED is a long-term multicenter trial -supported by the Spanish Health Ministry- designed to assess the effects of a Mediterranean-style diet on the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease. 17 groups of Spanish researchers in 200 health centres in Spain and 9000 patients at high risk of cardiovascular disease participate in the study.

Source: *Archives of Internal Medicine* 2007, Volume 167, Pages 1195-1203

"Effect of a traditional Mediterranean diet on lipoprotein oxidation: A randomized, controlled trial"

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