

A Mediterranean Diet May Prevent Cognitive Decline

Did you know that the risk of several chronic, degenerative diseases may be reduced by adopting a Mediterranean diet? A new study has found that following a Mediterranean eating pattern was linked with better performance in memory, language, and visuospatial perception.

A Mediterranean diet is based on the eating habits of populations that border the Mediterranean Sea. It encompasses cuisine from over 20 countries, including Spain, France, Italy, and Greece. This eating pattern is rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, low-fat dairy, and whole grains, while staying low in sugar, red meat, and processed foods.

The tricky thing is that there is no single Mediterranean eating pattern: components of the diet may vary depending on the region and population. In addition, connections between individual aspects of the Mediterranean diet and specific aspects of mental performance have not been frequently studied.

Costas Anastasiou and his team used a cohort population in Greece to assess the association of compliance to a Mediterranean eating plan with dementia and certain aspects of cognitive function.

Subjects who participated in the Hellenic Longitudinal Investigation of Aging and Diet (an ongoing population-based study identifying possible links between diet and cognitive function in a sample representative of the Greek regions) were part of the analysis.

A full clinical and neurological evaluation for the diagnosis of dementia was used and cognitive performance was evaluated according to five cognitive domains (language, memory, attention-speed, executive functioning, and visuospatial

perception) and a composite cognitive score. An *a priori* score based on a detailed food frequency questionnaire was used to assess adherence to the Mediterranean diet.

In 1,865 subjects (mean age 73 +/- 6 years, 41% male), 90 were confirmed to have dementia while 223 had mild cognitive impairment. A 10% decrease in the odds for dementia was seen with each unit increase in the Mediterranean dietary score.

Following a Mediterranean eating pattern was also linked with better performance in memory, language, visuospatial perception and the composite cognitive score. The associations for memory were strongest. Fish intake was negatively associated with dementia and cognitive performance was positively associated with non-processed cereal intake. What fascinating results!

Tenets of the Mediterranean Diet

- An overall **plant-based diet** with increased intake of a variety of fruits and vegetables.
- **Heart-healthy fats** such as olive oil, avocado, nuts, and seeds.
- **Lean protein**, including fish a few times per week. Adding legumes to meals as well.
- **Whole grains** such as bulgur, whole wheat couscous, oatmeal, and quinoa.
- Minimal red meat, sugar, alcohol, and dairy.