

Mediterranean Diet Helps Mental Health

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, October 13, 2009, abstracted from "Association of the Mediterranean Dietary Pattern with the Incidence of Depression: The Seguimiento Universidad de Navarra/University of Navarra Follow-up (SUN) Cohort" in the October 2009 issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry

Link -

<http://www.nowfoods.com/HealthLibrary/HealthArticles/HealthNotes/077873.htm?cat=Mental%20Fitness/Sleep%20%26%20Mood%20Support>

The Mediterranean Diet (MD) is characterized by high intakes of olive oil, fish, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Health benefits of following the MD include helping maintain a healthy blood pressure (1) (high blood pressure is expected to cost \$73 billion in 2009 to treat) (2), improving blood lipid profiles (3), supporting normal blood vessel function (4), [decreasing heart disease risk factors](#) (5) (which causes 1 out of every 2.8 death in the U.S.) (6), [increasing antioxidant levels](#) (7), [playing no role in obesity](#) (8) (which costs over \$100 billion per year) (9), and helping bone health in women (10) (osteoporosis costs more than \$18 billion per year to treat) (11).

Now a new study (12) has found that adhering to the MD may also help with mental health. Major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44 (13), affecting nearly 15 million American adults each year, which is nearly 7 percent of the U.S. population aged 18 and older (14). Major depressive disorder is a significant contributor to the \$83 billion cost of depression to our healthcare system each year (15).

In the study, more than 10,000 patients participating in the SUN Study (Seguimiento Universidad de Navarra) (16) provided data on their food intake using a 132-item food questionnaire (17) and then were followed up for 4 years. The researchers graded each patient's food intake on a scale (18) from 0 (least adherence to the Mediterranean Diet) to 9 (most adherence to the Mediterranean Diet).

The researchers found that, compared to those with the lowest adherence to the MD, those with the highest adherence had a 31% reduced risk of major depression. When looking at specific food groups, the highest intakes of fruits and nuts gave the highest reduction in risk (39% reduced risk) while the highest intakes of meat products produced the biggest increase in risk (35% increased risk). High intakes of legumes and a higher ratio of monounsaturated to saturated fat produced a 24% reduced risk of major depressive disorder.

For the researchers, "Our results suggest a potential protective role of the [Mediterranean Diet] with regard to the prevention of depressive disorders."

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