

Mediterranean Diet Helps Breast Health

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, October 21, 2009, abstracted from "Postmenopausal Breast Cancer Risk and Dietary Patterns in the E3N-EPIC Prospective Cohort Study", online in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*

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www.nowfoods.com/HealthLibrary/HealthArticles/HealthNotes/077820.htm?cat=Women's%20Specialty%20Formulas

The Mediterranean Diet (MD) is characterized by high intakes of olive oil, fish, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet 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 the Mediterranean Diet may help maintain breast health.

Breast cancer is the second biggest cancer killer of American women after lung cancer, responsible for the deaths of an estimated 40,580 women in 2004 (13) and contributing significantly to cancer's overall cost to society of \$219 billion per year (14).

In the study, over 65,000 women participating in the EPIC study (European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition) (15) completed a food questionnaire on 57 different food groups. Two dietary patterns were identified. Pattern 1 was characterized by consumption of "Western Foods" that included processed meat and meat products, French fries, potatoes, and pizza. Pattern 2 was characterized by a high intake of vegetables and fruits, fish and crustaceans, olives, and sunflower oil (the Mediterranean Diet)..

The researchers found that the 25% of women who adhered most closely to the Mediterranean Diet had a 15% overall decreased risk of breast cancer, but the 25% of women who adhered most closely to the Western Diet had a 20% overall increased risk of breast cancer. The researchers pointed to components of the Mediterranean Diet such as folic acid (16) and lignans (17) as well as omega-3 fats and the omega-6:omega-3 fatty acid ratio in the diet (18) as being significant contributors to the decreased breast cancer risk found by high adherence to the Mediterranean Diet.

For the researchers, "our findings suggest that postmenopausal breast cancer risk in women may be influenced by dietary habits" and that "avoidance of Western-type foods may reduce breast cancer risk in normal-weight women."

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