

Follow the Chisum Fitness Trail – Diets

RE: Mediterranean Diet

It is estimated that the American public spent well over one hundred billion dollars on diet related foods, books, plans, etc. last year. It is quite common that the best seller listings for the month will have one or more books on this topic prominently noted. Female oriented lay periodicals advertise each month different articles concerning weight loss or dietary options.

Every week, I am bombarded with questions concerning the “best diet”. Which of those publicized will reap the best rewards?

In the past, I have transmitted numerous articles on this subject. We have explored the high carbohydrate, low carbohydrate, high protein, low fat, low protein, and an assortment of combinations.

The confusion, frustration, and anxiety generated by the conflicting information are the only consistent factor in this discussion. To understand this statement, peruse through several publications of one periodical sold in the supermarkets. You will find conflicting data presented within their texts.

When reviewing research articles in peer refereed journals, it appears that the same confusion reigns. So, how do we choose the “perfect diet”?

In all reality, this is an individual answer. Some of you will find that as you age, the system does not digest carbohydrates very well. A diet concentrated with single carbohydrates will produce negative results. This can be limited by infusing complex carbohydrates in place of those that are simple.

You will note that the term “limited” was inserted within this discussion. There will be a few people that must control even the complex carbohydrates to reap the desired results. This is a rare situation, and not as common as some books on this subject reference.

Another variable which is the source of confusion involves diets from countries other than the United States. The common problem with this information resides within the environmental stress and societal practices.

Several new articles have touted the Mediterranean Diet as the best. The data indicates that it can reduce cardiovascular and cancer risks. It is important to review the facts in total before pronouncing this diet as being either good or bad.

Most research has been limited to Mediterranean men and women. Inhabitants of Greece seem to be the most preferred of these peoples.

If we review the mortality and morbidity rates between all Mediterranean peoples and those within the United States, there is an obvious difference in the incidence rates for both heart disease and diabetes. The lifestyles are contrasting in most cases; therefore comparable stress levels can not be controlled. Stress and stressful events, have a major impact upon both medical conditions.

The Mediterranean Diet has several factors which differentiate it from others in the public. It is more of a middle option between the high protein/low fat and low protein/high carbohydrate diets.

The defining factors are twofold; first, they are high fat, but also high in carbohydrates. Approximately 40% of all the daily kilocalories are produced from healthy fats. This is fat consumed by eating larger amounts of fish and nuts.

Fifty percent of this diet is made up of carbohydrates. These are complex carbohydrates found in grains and fresh vegetables.

In a recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine (June, 2003), it was reported that Greek adults which regularly conformed to this diet, lowered their risk of heart disease and cancer by 25%. This is a significant difference!

One other major factor must be discussed. These individuals participated in daily exercise. When reviewing the study, this benefit was noted when the person dedicated one hour of vigorous exercise to their daily routine. In fact, when compared to their sedentary counterpart, this decreased risk was 28%.

In conclusion: It appears that those eating regimens closely resembling the Mediterranean Diet present an interesting option for maximizing the health, and reduced risks for heart disease and diabetes. Data must be generated from American subjects to adequately note whether the benefits match those reported from the published research.

This diet isn't new, as it has been discussed within the professional community for several decades. It is only recently that many researchers are generating information which seems to support theories for both increased health and decreased risks for premature death.

So, what is the ideal diet? The following is a brief overview of some data which is accepted within the professional community. A diet rich in lycopene rich foods (tomato, autumn olive plant berries, etc.) have been shown to reduce the risk of stomach and prostate cancer. Two glasses of wine for the male and one for the female have reduced the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and Alzheimer's disease, but conversely any more will lead to negative results. Broccoli contains a chemical which kills the bacteria which can cause stomach cancer. Garlic, onions, and shallots may assist in reducing prostate cancer.

Infusion of these foods into the diet may provide an added benefit concerning the quality of life, and the possible quantity, or longevity. In either case, these foods are nutritiously rich in Vitamins and minerals.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Dr. Jack W. Chisum