

Pyramid of Health

Before you read

Do you eat smart?

Think about your eating pattern and food decisions.

Do you...

1. Consider nutrition when you make food choices?

a) usually b) sometimes c) never

2. Try to eat regular meals rather than to skip some?

a) usually b) sometimes c) never

3. Try to eat a variety of foods?

a) usually b) sometimes c) never

4. Try to balance your energy intake with your physical activity?

a) usually b) sometimes c) never

Getting ready to read

Which cultures enjoy the healthiest food, in your opinion?

Surprisingly, the richest countries may not have the best diets. What do you think?

Reading

1 In recent years a large number of medical specialists and dieticians have devoted much effort to convincing us that just about everything we eat is bad for us. But now, if one accepts the findings of two recent international conferences held in San Francisco, there is some good news. Excellent health, increased *longevity*, and many simple pleasures of life are all available if you are prepared to follow "the Mediterranean Diet", which is not so much a diet as a way of living.

2 Interest in the Mediterranean diet was first raised in the 1950's, when researchers from Harvard University's School of Nutrition became curious about why men and women on the islands of Crete and Sicily, many of whom lived well into their 80s, had one of the lowest rates of heart disease and cancer in the world.

3 They also noted a remarkably low rate of heart disease in other nations around the Mediterranean. Incidences of other diseases, such as breast and colon cancer, were also lower in the Mediterranean region, and in Greece and southern Italy *life expectancy* was about four years longer than in the U.S. or Northern Europe.

5 During more than 15 years of research, epidemiologists, who study large populations to identify "risk factors" for diseases, were unable to identify the *crucial* factors, which affected the health of these Mediterranean populations. Finally, in 1964, the researchers began to focus on what they identified as the "traditional Mediterranean diet".

6 They noted that the core of traditional Mediterranean cuisine of the 50's and 60's was an abundance of fruits and vegetables as well as large quantities of bread, pasta, *legumes*, nuts, couscous, rice and other grains. The overall diet included very little meat and only moderate amount of fish, poultry and dairy products. Sweets played a small role in the dining habits of the people and fruits were the main form of dessert. The two most *conspicuous* features of the Mediterranean diet were that olive oil accounted for as much as 40% of all of the fat consumed by most Mediterranean people and that they consumed wine with nearly every meal.

7 This and subsequent research resulted in the creation of the Optimal Traditional Mediterranean Diet Pyramid. The pyramid consists of nine levels, each representing the stress to be placed on various elements of the diet.

8 Red meat, at the pyramid's *pinnacle*, is recommended only a few times per month. Sweets, poultry, eggs and fish are recommended a few times a week, and olives, olive oil, dairy products, beans, legumes, nuts, fruits and vegetables and whole grains including pasta and rice are recommended on a daily basis. The major focus at recent conferences has been on olive oil and wine.

9 According to prof. Walter Willet, olives and olive oil lowers levels of LDL, which is considered the harmful or "bad" *cholesterol*. Olive oil also contains high quantities of antioxidants, today's nutritional miracle, and these are also thought to ward off heart disease.

11 As to the consumption of wine, the pyramid suggests that a moderate level of alcohol consumption, especially of red wine, also lowers the risk of heart disease and reduces overall mortality.

12 There are a few potential problems in all of this. Some point out, for example, that *advocating* a diet in which nearly 40% of the calories we take in comes from olive oil is problematic. Olive oil is pure 100% fat, and fat, no matter what its positive effects may be, is public health enemy number one.

Comprehension exercise

1. What is good news about diet, as found in two conferences?
2. What is the Mediterranean diet?
3. Where did doctors in the 1950's find the lowest rates of heart disease?
4. What are two important parts of the Mediterranean diet?
5. How much red meat should be eaten, according to the article?
6. Why are olives and olive oil beneficial to one's health?
7. Why might small amounts of wine be healthy?
8. What are some of the arguments against the Mediterranean diet?
9. What is your opinion of the diet? Is your diet similar to it?

Vocabulary building

The words are from the text above. Write the correct word in each blank.

Cholesterol

Advocate

Life expectancy

Legumes

Pinnacle

Crucial

Longevity

Conspicuous

1. The top of something is called its _____ .
2. Beans and lentils are types of _____ .
3. We wish you good health and _____ .
4. If you support an idea or behaviour publicly, you _____ it.
5. If someone stands out in a crowd s/he is _____ .
6. If something is extremely important because it will affect other things, it is _____ .
7. Too much _____ can lead to heart disease.
8. The number of years we are likely to live is our _____ .