



[engelsk]

Diabetes and the Mediterranean diet (Diabetes og middelhavskost)

The Mediterranean region has traditionally enjoyed a diet that carries a lower risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

The Mediterranean diet varies from region to region, but typically consists of olive oil, small amounts of meat, a lot of plant-based dishes and a little wine.

Olive oil

Olive oil is extensively used – in some areas of the Mediterranean, it is the only fat that households traditionally employ. It is a special oil because it contains large amounts of monounsaturated fat. This fat does not increase cholesterol, and the oil can be used for cooking, salad dressings and for sprinkling over cooked vegetables to enhance flavour. Rapeseed oil contains almost as much monounsaturated fat as olive oil, but has a more neutral taste.

More vegetables and fruit

Mediterraneans often use vegetables as the main ingredient of a dish. Soups, salads and recipes using seasonal vegetables are all common. Fruit and vegetables contain both antioxidants and anticarcinogens. Antioxidants prevent cholesterol in the blood from oxidising and forming plaque on the artery walls. In addition, in recent years, anticarcinogens have been discovered in many vegetables. Garlic in particular has been highly praised, but the benefits to health probably derive from the large quantity of many different vegetables consumed.

Nuts

Nuts are a staple part of the diet in many parts of the Mediterranean. Nuts also contain heart-healthy fats

and other beneficial nutrients. A daily ration of nuts or almonds makes a good snack or ingredient in a vegetable dish.

Beans, lentils, rice, grains and pasta

Beans, peas and lentils are important Mediterranean dietary ingredients. Rice and other cereal grains are important in some areas, while in others pasta is one of the staples. Bread is mainly used as a supplement to meals, not as a main ingredient. Far fewer potatoes are consumed than in Norway.

Beans, peas and lentils are especially good for people with diabetes because they provide a steadier supply of blood sugar and require less insulin. Potatoes and bread made with processed flour, on the other hand, are easily digested and produce a rapid rise in blood sugar. Rice, pasta and wholemeal bread come somewhere in between, but it is worth noting that you can now buy wholegrain pasta with more fibre in it. Both wholegrain pasta and wholegrain rice produce a lower rise in blood sugar (low GI) and are more filling because of their higher fibre content.

Fish and meat

Beef is not part of the traditional Mediterranean diet; special meals will usually be made with fish or chicken. Fish, especially fatty species like sardines and herring, contain the heart-healthy omega-3 fats. Chicken and other poultry also have a better fat composition than other meats.

Milk, cheese and butter

In earlier times, dairy products were not a major part of the Mediterranean diet. Children stopped drinking milk once they had finished breast-feeding. Butter is not commonly used, but cheese is part of most Mediterranean cuisines. For people with diabetes, it is a good idea to watch out for the lactose and fat content of cheese.

Wine

Small amounts of alcohol seem to be good for the health, especially when drunk Mediterranean-style, at meal times and in small quantities. Alcohol in the blood then rises only slowly. Apart from its alcohol content, red wine may have other health benefits from antioxidants and other nutrients. Large volumes of alcohol, especially outside of meal times, are bad for the health.

Physical activity

When discussing the Mediterranean diet, it is easy to forget that the smallholders and fishermen who have this as their daily fare are physically active all day, with just a break for a well-earned siesta. Physical activity and low stress levels are important prerequisites for good health, and diet needs to be seen in this light.

Tip

How to bring some of the Mediterranean diet into Norwegian cuisine: Use olive oil and rapeseed oil for cooking. Eat more plant-based foods and use more nuts, peas, beans and lentils in your cooking. There is no end to the varieties of salads, vegetable dishes and soups you can make.

P.S. And don't forget the fish!

This factsheet by the Norwegian Diabetes Association (Diabetesforbundet) was updated in 2013.