

Script – Print – The Mediterranean diet, exercise and bone loss

There's always plenty of discussion when it comes to the benefits of diets. In one recent [study](#) in the JAMA Network Open, researchers found the lower-calorie Mediterranean diet combined with exercise, helped older women lose weight with beneficial effects on bone mass density.

The study was completed in hospitals and medical centers across Spain and included more than 900 women who ranged in age from 55 to 75. Half the group was instructed to eat a Mediterranean diet with no calorie restrictions and were not required to exercise. The other half was encouraged to walk for at least 45 minutes a day for six days a week and do strength exercises three days a week. This group saw significant improvement in stronger bones.

There are many factors when it comes to bone loss including age, body weight, diet and physical activity. Nicole O'Neill, a dietitian with OSF HealthCare, says the Mediterranean diet and exercise can prevent bone loss, if weight bearing exercise, such as lifting weights, is part of the program.

"This was not studied specifically for the Mediterranean diet and bone loss," she explains. "It was something they found incidentally and then studied it closer. It's not that it's wrong, it's just that it's inconclusive."

A lack of calcium and vitamin D are also major factors in bone density loss. "The Mediterranean diet overall limits the amount of dairy, so most people get the majority of their calcium and vitamin D from dairy products," says O'Neill. "So, say you were doing three glasses of milk a day. If you switched to a Mediterranean diet and dropped down to one glass of milk, you could cause bone loss because you're getting less calcium and vitamin D if you're not careful."

The typical American standard diet includes plenty of processed foods and lacks in fruits and vegetables.

The Mediterranean diet is popular because it features simple, plant-based cooking, with each meal featuring fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and seeds and an emphasis on extra-virgin olive oil. The diet is rich in nutrients that help bone health. Vitamin C from fruits and vegetables can help support bone cells and vitamin K found in spinach can help with bone formation.

"I really do like the Mediterranean diet," O'Neill says. "There are a lot of pros. The cons are it's a little fussy. You have to push and pull things around, and you have to be careful to fill in the gaps with foods that are appropriate. If you're not used to having that bigger load of fruits and vegetables and whole grains, that's a lot of fiber that maybe your guts are not used to. So, a slow, incremental approach might be the best way to start."

Regarding any study, O'Neill says it's important to read and do your research before coming to any conclusions. Don't rely on information from the Internet, she adds. You're likely to get misleading information. Instead, talk to your provider or a dietitian who can interpret the numbers found in the study.

"There are really a lot of moving parts," O'Neill says. "When you start a new diet, we don't want a crash course. We want it to be sustainable. We want it to be long term, and we want it to be something that fits for you and that makes sense."

For more information on nutrition, visit the [OSF HealthCare](#) website.