



# WellnessOne Newsletter

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## Do You Practice These 4 Habits of Some of the World's Healthiest People?

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Eating a "Mediterranean diet" could prevent or even reverse metabolic syndrome, a cluster of risk factors for heart disease and diabetes. Scientists believe that a Mediterranean-style diet has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects on your body.



A review of 35 clinical trials found that faithfully eating a Mediterranean diet can improve traits such as belly fat, high blood pressure, low levels of "good" HDL cholesterol, elevated blood fat levels, and high blood sugar.

Reuters reports:

*"For instance, those who stuck with the Mediterranean diet as compared to eating their regular foods or a low-fat diet trimmed their waistlines by about 0.43 cm (0.16 inches) on average. They also showed slashed their blood pressure by 2.35 points on the top reading, and their fasting blood sugar by 3.89 milligrams per deciliter."*

### Sources:

» [Reuters March 7, 2011](#)

» [Journal of the American College of Cardiology March 15, 2011;57\(11\):1299-313](#)

### Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Contrary to popular belief, there's actually no *one* "Mediterranean diet." At least 16 countries border the Mediterranean Sea, and dietary habits vary from country to country due to differences in culture, ethnic background, religion, economy and agricultural production. However, "the Mediterranean diet" is typically characterized as a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables with liberal use of olive oil, while being low in fish, poultry and red meat.

This emphasis on fresh vegetables alone makes it FAR more healthful than the standard American diet which is very high in processed foods. The simple act of reducing your intake of MSG, a neurotoxin, and high fructose corn syrup, which aggravates inflammation, will in and of itself have a positive impact on your health.

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But an interesting point to consider is that the Mediterranean diet as you know it may actually be a far cry from what people in that region actually consumed for many generations.

### What is the Mediterranean Diet, Really?

Like the U.S. food pyramid, the commonly referred to "Mediterranean diet" vilifies saturated fats. Foods like red meats and eggs, according to most reports of the diet, should be eaten sparingly.

However, a true traditional Mediterranean diet was by no means low in saturated fats. Homemade sausages, raw full-fat milk and cheeses, eggs and, when they could be found, meats like lamb and pork were commonly enjoyed. And while Mediterraneans did eat some grains, even that was often cooked with a hefty serving of animal fat.

According to "[The Mediterranean Diet: Pasta or Pastrami?](#)" written by Sally Fallon and Mary Enig:

*"Consider the description of food in Sardinia [in Recipes of All Nations, published in 1935]. Grains are certainly a part of their diet, consumed as bread, pasta or polenta, but in most interesting ways. "One of their favorite ways of cooking macaroni is to cook it in either lamb or pork fat . . . with small pieces of either lamb or pork, chopped tomatoes, chopped garlic and curd, mixed with a little water and salt and moistened with a little game stock, if this is obtainable."*



*Gnocchi is flavored with saffron and "served with a tomato sauce, or with gravy and cheese made from ewe's milk."*

*Bland polenta is enlivened with "chopped salt pork, small pieces of sausages and grated cheese."*

*La Favata is made with "pieces of salt pork, cut in large chunks, ham bone, special homemade sausages, a handful of dried beans, wild fennel, and other herbs and a little water."*

*Nothing lowfat so far."*

Could it be that Mediterraneans were actually eating a high-fat diet for generations, one rich in full-fat animal foods, and still experienced the low rates of heart disease the area is known for?

Absolutely.

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Saturated fats have been wrongly blamed for the epidemics of heart disease and obesity. In reality, these [healthy animal fats](#) are necessary and very good for you -- [and your heart](#).

## **The Same Man Responsible for Demonizing Saturated Fats Created the Modern "Mediterranean Diet"**

The demonization of saturated fat began in 1953 with [Dr. Ancel Keys](#)' publication of a heavily flawed paper comparing fat intake and heart disease mortality, and the misguided ousting of saturated fat has continued ever since.

It was as a result of nutritionists buying into Ancel Keys' "lipid hypothesis" that dietary fat causes heart disease that Americans were soon encouraged to substitute vegetable-based fats for animal fats, and to avoid red meat completely.

[As Enig and Fallon write:](#)

*"Keys ... published his Seven Countries Study in which he claimed a relationship between high rates of coronary heart disease and consumption of saturated fat in seven countries. He was able to do this by handpicking countries where both heart disease and consumption of saturated fats were high and by ignoring countries with the same kind of diet but where heart disease was low."*



Interestingly, a little-known fact is that it was also Ancel Keys who, in the 1950s, was responsible for first describing the Mediterranean diet as one characterized by grains and other plant foods and low in saturated fats. The basis for his theory was time spent in a poor, coastal area of Italy, in the years following World War II, which had likely left food shortages in the region.

Further, Keys himself was an underpaid visiting professor at the time and likely did not have the resources to splurge on richer Mediterranean foods, which may also explain why he observed a diet rich in breads and plant foods and not much else. Again [Enig and Fallon write:](#)

*"Was the lean, so-called Mediterranean diet they [Keys and his wife] observed after the war the true Mediterranean diet? Or were they observing the tail end of deprivation engendered by half a decade of conflict? ... And did Keys miss the sight of Italians enjoying rich food in the early 1950s because Italians had never done such a shameful thing, or was the visiting professor too poor at the time to afford anything more than plain pizza in a sidewalk cafe?"*

The truth is, a "real" Mediterranean diet is full of rich flavors, including those from animal fats, dairy and meat. They also enjoy an assortment of traditionally fermented foods and some vegetables, which again were often cooked with cream, olive oil or lard.

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So anytime you hear about the Mediterranean diet and its propensity to protect your heart, remember that traditionally Mediterranean's health was likely supported not by a diet high in carbs, but one rich in animal fats and an assortment of other fresh, unprocessed foods.

However, there's another variable that likely plays a significant part in producing the benefits typically recognized as the result of a Mediterranean diet as well.

### **The Mediterranean Diet Effect May Be About More Than Just Food...**

The [meta-analysis published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#) last month included a total of 50 original research studies—35 of them clinical trials—evaluating the effects of the Mediterranean diet on metabolic syndrome. Clearly, this type of diet will go a long way toward improving metabolic syndrome and heart health, especially if you abstain from breads, which can also be a significant part of the diet in certain Mediterranean areas.

But *physical exercise* is at least as important as your diet to achieve these results.

Dan Buettner's book, [The Blue Zone – Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest](#), looks at the lifestyles of centenarians across the world. Some of the common denominators among the people who've lived the longest (and therefore, presumably, enjoyed fewer life-threatening health problems) include:



- Eating a plant-based diet, aka a Mediterranean-style diet
- Living in areas that promote regular physical activity, such as daily walking as the main means of getting around
- Living in societies where friends and family encourage a healthy, natural, active lifestyle
- Having effective strategies for coping with stress, such as prayer, meditation, strong social networks, and napping daily

So, although numerous studies have confirmed that the Mediterranean diet confers great health benefits, this effect may not be entirely due to the food choices alone. Many of the studies finding lower death rates and reduction in chronic illnesses are international studies that include countries other than the U.S., which is notoriously exercise-deficient.

Therefore, lifestyle factors such as more physical activity may also play a part. And when it comes to preventing or treating metabolic syndrome, exercise is clearly a crucial component, so I don't think we can ignore exercise when evaluating the findings from this meta-analysis, even though it only looked at adherence to a Mediterranean diet.

### **What is Metabolic Syndrome, and How Do You Prevent or Treat it?**

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[Metabolic syndrome](#) is a potentially deadly mix of several conditions or symptoms including:

Obesity	High blood pressure	Elevated triglycerides
Lack of physical activity	Low levels of "good" HDL cholesterol	Elevated blood sugar, insulin resistance and diabetes

Exercise is a potent remedy for all of these, primarily because it's so effective at reducing insulin resistance, and it is [insulin resistance that the KEY factor in metabolic syndrome](#).

In fact, the treatment for metabolic syndrome is identical to that for insulin resistance and diabetes, which includes:

1. **Exercise:** Exercise is an absolutely essential factor, without which you're highly unlikely to get either diabetes or metabolic syndrome under control. It is clearly one of the most potent ways to lower your insulin and leptin resistance.

The key here though is to [avoid focusing your exercise efforts on cardio](#) as I wrote last week. Doing [Peak 8 high intensity exercises](#) are far better for improving your health overall.



2. **Eliminate Grains and Sugars:** You need to eliminate foods that your body will react to by creating insulin, which includes all types of sugars (especially fructose) and grains -- even "healthy" grains such as whole, organic grains. Reducing or [eliminating carbohydrates is one of the most potent longevity strategies](#) out there, for the very reason that you're improving your insulin sensitivity. This means avoiding all breads, pasta, cereals, rice, potatoes, and corn (which is in fact a grain). You may even need to avoid fruits until your blood sugar is under control.
3. **Eat Right for Your Nutritional Type:** Exercising and avoiding grains and sugars might not be enough unless you balance your protein, carb and fat ratios for your unique and specific genetic biochemistry. This is so important to overall health that I now offer my entire online [nutritional typing test free of charge](http://products.mercola.com/nutritional-typing/) at <http://products.mercola.com/nutritional-typing/>.
4. **Optimize Your Vitamin D Level:** Maintaining your vitamin D levels around 60-80 ng/ml can significantly help control your blood sugar.

Ideally, you'll want to do this by exposing a large amount of your skin to [appropriate amounts of sunshine](#) (or a [safe tanning bed](#)) on a regular basis, year-round. If neither of

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these options are available, you may want to use an oral vitamin D3 supplement. Just remember to get your [levels tested regularly by a proficient lab](#) to make sure you're within the therapeutic range stated above.

It's quite clear that your lifestyle accounts for the vast majority of your health- and longevity potential, with diet and exercise topping the list. And a primary reason for this is because these factors work *hand in hand* to help you maintain healthy insulin levels and reduce inflammation.

The Mediterranean diet, again, is so much closer to the ideal that it's no surprise it has a high success ratio, but I firmly believe you cannot overlook the importance of exercise when addressing metabolic syndrome and all of its components.

### **Exercise Right for Optimal Results and Disease Prevention**

Perhaps the most important aspect of exercising for disease prevention is fast- and super-fast muscle fiber development. While many people focus on endurance, endurance actually comes as *a by-product* of super fast-twitch fiber development, as [explained by Phil Campbell in this previous interview](#).

How do you develop your super-fast muscle fibers?

Through high-intensity, burst-type exercises, such as Peak 8.

The reason why this type of exercise is so important is because it's the only way to coax your body into naturally producing human growth hormone (HGH), which is key for fitness and longevity, AND it's the only way to truly work your heart muscle.

Your body does *not* produce HGH after long, slow exercise. Only [Peak 8-style exercises -- the short, quick-burst anaerobic type of exercise](#), for short periods of time -- accomplish this.

Ditto for working your heart.

To understand this better, you first need to know that you have three types of muscle fibers: slow, fast, and super-fast.

The slow muscle fibers are the red, oxygen-filled muscles. The fast- and super-fast are your white muscles. Your blood supply primarily goes to your red (slow) muscles. The white muscles (fast- and super-fast) do not get a lot of blood because they don't need much. They get their energy from the stored up energy in your body, as opposed from the oxygen-rich blood.

Working your super-fast fiber forces your heart to work anaerobically, so you get a great comprehensive heart muscle workout when you do Peak 8-style exercises. Many mistakenly



believe that cardio works out your heart muscle, but what you're really working is your slow twitch muscle fibers. You're *not* working the anaerobic process of your heart.

Your heart actually has two totally different processes; the aerobic process and the anaerobic process.

The *anaerobic process* lines up with your *fast and super-fast twitch muscle fibers* that are used during Peak 8 type exercises.

Meanwhile, traditional strength training and cardio only works your slow twitch muscle fibers. Your body kicks in these slow twitch muscles first, in an effort to not recruit your fast twitch muscles or work your heart anaerobically. This is why you may not see results even though you spend an hour on the treadmill a few times a week – you're basically denying the natural physiology of your body by not working the other half of your muscle fibers; your fast-twitch muscles.

In addition, about half of your muscle fibers are fast twitch fibers, and if you do not exercise these fast muscles, they begin to atrophy, which is detrimental to physical health and fitness.

The research is so clear about the superior benefits of this type of exercise that the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine have totally revised their exercise cardio guidelines. Their new guidelines now state that you can do moderate intensity cardio, five days a weeks for 30 minutes, or you can do vigorous intensity cardio for 20 minutes, three days a week, which is exactly what Peak 8 is.



Ask your WellnessOne doctor about a great way to acclimate yourself to a modified Mediterranean Diet now available in our office.

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