



Women: Eat Well, Live Longer?

Diet of Whole Foods Associated With Lower Risk of Death in Women

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June 23, 2008 -- Eating well is good for us. But can eating a certain way also help you live longer and cut your chances of developing heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke?

A new study suggests a link between what women eat and whether they die from certain diseases.

Researchers led by Christin Heidemann from Harvard's School of Public Health and the German Institute of Human Nutrition tracked more than 72,000 women, 30 to 55 years old, who had no history of health problems at the beginning of the study. The study spanned 18 years, from 1984 to 2002; every two to four years, the women answered questionnaires about what they ate.

Two distinct dietary patterns emerged.

Researchers called one pattern the "high prudent" diet. This included lots of vegetables, fruit, legumes, and whole grains, as well as lean protein sources such as fish and poultry.

The other dietary pattern, dubbed "Western," included more red and processed meat, refined grains, french fries, sugary foods, and desserts.

It Pays to Be 'Prudent'

During 18 years of tracking, 6,011 of the participants died.

Women with the most "prudent diet" had a 28% lower risk of dying from heart disease. They also had a 17% lower risk of death from all the diseases studied, including cancer, diabetes, and stroke.

Women who followed a diet highest in meats, processed and refined foods, and sweets had a 22% higher risk of dying from heart disease. They also had a 21% increased risk of dying from all causes combined.

"These results highlight the importance of intensifying public health efforts to promote the adoption of a healthy overall diet including high intakes of vegetables, fruit, legumes, whole grains, fish and poultry and low intakes of red and processed meat, refined grains, French fries and sweets," says Heidemann in a prepared

statement.

"Traditionally, there has been a focus on single nutrients or foods, but in terms of longevity a greater focus on dietary patterns can take into account the complexity of the overall diet," Heidemann says.

Healthy Diet, Lifestyle Tips

Here are some lifestyle and diet guidelines from the American Heart Association, which are in line with following a "prudent" diet:

- Limit saturated fat, trans fat , cholesterol , and sodium.

- Minimize sugary foods and beverages.

- Eat lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain and high-fiber foods.

- Eat fat-free and low-fat dairy products.

- Eat fish at least twice a week.

- Be physically active and keep weight at healthy levels.

- Avoid using or breathing tobacco smoke.

- Achieve and maintain healthy cholesterol, blood pressure , and blood glucose levels.

The study is published in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

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