

Children consuming a Mediterranean diet are 15 percent less likely to be overweight

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A study of 8 European countries presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Sofia, Bulgaria, shows that children consuming a diet more in line with the rules of the Mediterranean one are 15% less likely to be overweight or obese than those children who do not.

The research is by Dr Gianluca Tognon, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden, and colleagues across the 8 countries: Sweden, Germany, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Belgium, Estonia and Hungary.

The researchers used data from the IDEFICS study (Identification and Prevention of Dietary – and lifestyle – induced health effects in Children and infantS), funded by the European Commission. Weight, height, waist circumference, and percent body fat mass were measured in [children](#) from these eight countries.

Vegetables, fruit, nuts and fish

The parents of these children were interviewed by means of a questionnaire specifically designed for the IDEFICS study and enquiring about the consumption frequency of 43 foods. Additional dietary data have been complemented by a telephone interview performed on a sub-sample of parents.

The adherence to a Mediterranean-like diet was assessed by a score calculating by giving one point for high intakes of each food group which was considered typical of the Mediterranean diet (vegetables, fruit and nuts, fish and cereal grains), as well as one point for low intakes of foods untypical of the Mediterranean diet (such as dairy and meat products). High scoring children were then considered high-adherent and compared to the others.

Swedish children most Mediterranean

Interestingly, the prevalence of high adherence to a Mediterranean-like diet was found to be independent of the geographical distribution, with the Swedish children scoring the highest (followed by the Italians) and the children from Cyprus scoring the lowest.

The team found that children with a high adherence to a Mediterranean-like [diet](#) were 15% less likely to be overweight or obese than low-adherent children. The findings were independent of age, sex, socioeconomic status or country of residence.

The children with high adherence at baseline were 10-15% less likely to be among those who went through major increases in BMI, waist circumference and body fat.

"The promotion of a Mediterranean dietary pattern is no longer a feature of Mediterranean countries. Considering its potential beneficial effects on [obesity](#) prevention, this dietary pattern should be part of EU obesity prevention strategies and its promotion should be particularly intense in those countries where low levels of adherence are detected." says Gianluca Tognon, researcher at the Sahlgrenska Academy.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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