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Definition of the Mediterranean Diet; A Literature Review

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Abstract

Numerous studies over several decades suggest that following the Mediterranean diet (MedDiet) can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer, and improve cognitive health. However, there are inconsistencies among methods used for evaluating and defining the MedDiet. Through a review of the literature, we aimed to quantitatively define the MedDiet by food groups and nutrients. Databases PubMed, MEDLINE, Science Direct, Academic Search Premier and the University of South Australia Library Catalogue were searched. Articles were included if they defined the MedDiet in at least two of the following ways: (1) general descriptive definitions; (2) diet pyramids/numbers of servings of key foods; (3) grams of key foods/food groups; and (4) nutrient and flavonoid content. Quantity of key foods and nutrient content was recorded and the mean was calculated. The MedDiet contained three to nine serves of vegetables, half to two serves of fruit, one to 13 serves of cereals and up to eight serves of olive oil daily. It contained approximately 9300 kJ, 37% as total fat, 18% as monounsaturated and 9% as saturated, and 33 g of fibre per day. Our results provide a defined nutrient content and range of servings for the MedDiet based on past and current literature. More detailed reporting amongst studies could refine the definition further.

Keywords: Mediterranean diet, food groups, nutrient content, flavonoids, olive oil, monounsaturated fatty acid

Full text

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