

Mediterranean Diet May Strengthen Brain Health in Latinos

Whole grains and fish are the most beneficial for brain health.

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Latinos who adhere to the Mediterranean [diet](#) may strengthen tissue connections in the [brain](#) and potentially decrease their risk for cognitive decline, according to a study [published in Stroke](#).

The [Mediterranean diet](#) typically consists of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, fish, legumes, seeds, herbs and spices and has been linked to several health benefits, including lower risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer, according to [the Mayo Clinic](#).

About 10% of U.S. adults ages 45 and older experience cognitive decline and worsening [memory](#), according to an [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) news release. For Latino adults, that rate is about 11.4% higher compared with other racial groups.

“Other studies have shown adherence to the Mediterranean diet is associated with preserved brain health, but these studies have mainly looked at white people,” said Gabriela Trifan, MD, lead study researcher and assistant professor of neurology at the University of Illinois Chicago. “Our study is the first to address Hispanic and Latino people living in the U.S., a growing population that is at increased risk for cardiovascular disease and dementia.”

While [previously published research](#) by Trifan and her team found that sticking to a culturally tailored Mediterranean diet could lower the risk for Alzheimer’s disease and cognitive decline in middle-aged Latinos, the current study aimed to explore the link between diet, brain and cardiovascular health.

The study involved 2,774 participants in the Study of Latinos–Investigation of Neurocognitive Aging–MRI Ancillary Study. Participants reported what they had eaten in the past 24 hours, then calculated how closely the meals adhered to the Mediterranean diet using a scale from 0 to 9. Cardiovascular health was also assessed based on whether individuals exercised regularly,

smoked and maintained a healthy weight.

After about 10 years, researchers used brain scans to measure the organization of the fibers connecting different brain regions and enhanced communication, known as white matter integrity, and cardiovascular health.

Participants who more closely adhered to a Mediterranean diet had better preservation of white matter integrity and volume and less evidence of structural damage to the brain. The largest brain health benefit came from eating whole grains and fish.

What's more, better cardiovascular health accounted for some of the improved white matter projections.

"This tells us that eating a Mediterranean diet might not just improve cognition by improving heart health, it might actually be making important changes to the brain," said Andreana Benitez, PhD, an associate professor of neurology at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, who was not involved in the study.

To read more, click [#Brain](#) or [#Diet](#). There, you'll see headlines such as "[Junk Food and Drug Use Cut Into Life Expectancy Gains for States](#)," "[Alzheimer's Disease May Damage the Brain in Two Phases](#)" and "[Exercise and Diet Combine to Improve Liver Health in People With MASH](#)."