TuSalud

Salud! Nutritious Diets Build a Stronger, More Efficient Heart

Latino adults who consistently ate healthily found their hearts could pump blood more efficiently and reduced the thickness of its walls.

November 26, 2021 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Prior research shows that a good diet is key to people maintaining a healthy heart. Now, new findings from the Echocardiographic Study of Latinos (Echo-SOL), a study presented at a recent annual meeting of the American Heart Association (AHA), Scientific Sessions 2021, offer additional evidence that shows adult Latinos who consistently ate a healthy diet bettered the ability of their heart to pump blood and decreased the thickness of the wall of the heart, factors that indicate the organ is healthy and working optimally, reports an AHA press release.

For the study, from 2008 to 2011, researchers organized a sample of 1,824 participants in Echo-SOL, a subset of the Hispanic Communities Health Study/Study of Latinos (HCHS-SOL), the parent investigation. Scientists selected participants from this population-based study situated at four sites—Bronx, NY; Chicago, IL; San Diego, CA; and Miami, FL—and from 2011 to 2014 administered a non-invasive ultrasound or echocardiogram to enrollees that measured their heart function and structure, specifically the walls of the heart.

Investigators also used in-depth questionnaires to gauge participants' adherence to two healthy eating plans: the DASH (Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension), used to help people manage their blood pressure, and the AHEI diet (Alternative Healthy Eating Index), which measured how closely individuals followed the Department of Agriculture's dietary guidelines for Americans. (Basically, both diets stress eating lots of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, whole grains and lean vegetable or animal protein—preferably poultry and fish—and limit sweets, salt, red or processed meats and unhealthy fats.)

Researchers found that those participants who stuck to either one or the other of the two diets improved the structure and function of their hearts and lessened the thickness of the walls of their ticker.

"The results underscore the importance of a healthy diet as a means of preventing heart disease, one of the leading causes of death among Hispanic and Latino people," said David Flomenbaun, BA, BS, a medical student at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City and the lead author of the study. "The association between adherence to one of the healthy eating patterns

and better heart pumping function reassures us that these diet scores are associated with healthier hearts."

Researchers cited several limitations of the study that included the inability of the findings to prove a cause-and-effect relationship showing that eating healthy resulted in a healthy heart. Also, scientists indicated their dependence on individuals' recall of the foods they ate and that they did not control for other factors that might affect heart function and structure.

Nevertheless, the AHA released a new scientific statement stressing that good nutrition as well as calorie intake and physical activity work in tandem to support heart health.

"We can all benefit from a heart-healthy dietary pattern regardless of stage of life, and it is possible to design one that is consistent with personal preferences, lifestyle and cultural customs," said Alice H. Lichtenstein, DSc, the chair of the scientific statement writing group and a senior scientist at Tufts University's Cardiovascular Nutrition Laboratory in Boston.

To learn more about heart disease, read "6 Tips That Will Give You a Healthier Heart."

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