

## Healthy Diet In Middle Age Leads to Healthier Old Age

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New results from a long-running study offer fresh evidence that a “healthy” diet is actually good for you. **The study shows that women who followed a healthy diet while in middle age had a much better chance of reaching 70 without any of the major illnesses or impairments usually associated with old age.**



In a paper published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Cecilia Samieri and colleagues analyzed **data from 10,670 women who participated in the Nurses' Health Study** and who had no major diseases in the mid-1980s when they were in their late 60s and early 70s. They found **that women with healthy diets** (as assessed by the Alternative Healthy Eating Index-2010 and the Alternate Mediterranean diet scores) **were much more likely to reach the age of 70 with no major chronic diseases, no impairment in cognition, no physical disabilities, and intact mental health.**

As described by the authors, the healthy diets “generally focus on greater intakes of plant foods, whole grains, and fish or long-chain  $\omega$ -3 PUFAs; moderate intake of alcohol; and lower intake of red and processed meats.”

Compared to women with the lowest diet scores, women with diet scores in the highest quintile had a 61% to 80% increase in the odds of becoming a “healthy ager.” After adjusting for other known risk factors the women in the highest quintile had a 34%-46% increase. These trends were all highly significant. The healthy agers also had less

hypertension and hypercholesterolemia, exercise more, and were less likely to be obese or to smoke.

Only 11% of the women in the overall study group met the definition of healthy agers. Two-thirds had no major chronic disease, 43% had no mental health limitations, and 27% had no impairment of physical function. 12% of the women had had a heart attack or bypass surgery, 8% had diabetes, and 6% had breast cancer.

Summarizing their findings, **the authors wrote that they “found that greater quality of diet at midlife was strongly associated with increased odds of good health and well-being among individuals surviving to older ages. These data may have an especially important role in promoting a healthy diet—maintaining physical, cognitive, and mental health with aging may provide a more powerful incentive for dietary change than simply prolonging life or avoiding any single chronic disease.”**

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