

The Middle Eastern and biblical origins of the Mediterranean diet.

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OBJECTIVE: To place the Mediterranean diet (MedDi) in the context of the cultural history of the Middle East and emphasise the health effects of some of the biblical seven species - wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and date honey. **DESIGN:** Review of the literature concerning the benefits of these foods. **SETTING:** Middle East and Mediterranean Basin. **SUBJECTS:** Mediterranean populations and clinical studies utilising the MedDi. **Results and conclusions** The MedDi has been associated with lower rates of CVD, and epidemiological evidence promotes the benefits of consuming fruit and vegetables. Recommended foods for optimal health include whole grain, fish, wine, pomegranates, figs, walnuts and extra virgin olive oil. The biblical traditional diet, including the seven species and additional Mediterranean fruits, has great health advantages, especially for CVD. In addition to the diet, lifestyle adaptation that involves increasing physical activity and organised meals, together with healthy food choices, is consistent with the traditional MedDi. The MedDi is a manageable, lifestyle-friendly diet that, when fortified with its biblical antecedent attributes, may prove to be even more enjoyable and considerably healthier in combating the obesogenic environment and in decreasing the risks of the non-communicable diseases of modern life than conventional, modern dietary recommendations. The biblical seven species, together with other indigenous foods from the Middle East, are now scientifically recognised as healthy foods, and further improve the many beneficial effects of the MedDi.