



# Why Is the Mediterranean Diet Heart-Healthy? It's Not the Cheese and Wine

By  
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The Mediterranean diet has been popping up all over headlines and in medical literature in recent years. If the sound bites are to be believed, switching to a Mediterranean diet will make you lose weight and feel great.

## What Is the Mediterranean Diet and Why Is It So Good?

In this video by Dr. Michael Greger, the public health director at the Humane Society, he looks at what the real Mediterranean diet is all about. It turns out that although people associate the Mediterranean Diet with Italy and therefore think of olive oil, cheese, and wine, that's not the Mediterranean diet that goes hand in hand with better health.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqbQ82ld-4o>

## The Famous Mediterranean Diet Is Mostly Plants, Not Wine and Cheese:

It turns out that the Mediterranean diet has nothing to do with wine and cheese. It actually has to do with plants. After World War II, the Rockefeller foundation assessed the area for the government of Greece. What they found was exceptionally low rates of heart disease in the region, which excited nutrition scientist Ancel Keys, who set out to study health and longevity there in 1958.

In his [Seven Countries Study](#), published in 1970, Keys found that Greek islanders on Crete had incredibly low levels of heart disease. They also had the lowest cancer and mortality rates of all the countries studied. These findings sparked worldwide interest in the "Mediterranean diet," which still continues today... but no one talks about what the people in the study were really eating.

## What Were They Eating on Crete During the 1950s and 1960s?

- It was a **near-vegetarian diet**.

- The diet on the island was more than **90% plant based**, which explains why they had such low rates of heart disease.
- The only people on the island who did not have low rates of heart disease were the richest class, who ate meat every day.

## The Mediterranean Diet Today:

Unfortunately, very few people are actually eating the famed Mediterranean diet now, even people in that region of the world. Within the past few decades, people have started to eat more meat and cheese and fewer plants. And yes, heart disease has skyrocketed in the past few decades in the Mediterranean region.

Studies show that a [whole-food, plant-based diet](#) goes hand in hand with less heart disease, less cancer, less obesity, less diabetes, and longer life. If you want to follow the *real* Mediterranean diet, it's not about the cheese and wine. It's about the fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and tubers.

Sources:

<http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/61/6/1321S.abstract>

<http://nutritionfacts.org/topics/mediterranean-diet/>