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**Eating a Mediterranean diet SLASHES your risk of heart disease – and could save 20,000 lives every year**

**BY LIZZIE PARRY**

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The diet, rich in fresh fruit and veg, wholegrains and olive oil, cut risk by up to 16 per cent, Cambridge University scientists said

**A Mediterranean diet does protect the heart, and could save up to 20,000 Brits a year, experts said today.**

Following in the footsteps of our Mediterranean neighbours and stocking up on fresh fruit and veg, wholegrains, nuts and seeds can prove a life saver.

The first study to examine the link between the[Med diet](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1690077/why-the-med-diet-is-so-good-for-you-and-how-it-lowers-your-risk-of-heart-disease-cancer-and-dementia/)and heart disease in a British population, found the way of eating cuts risk of cardiovascular disease by six to 16 per cent.

The findings, published on World Heart Day, backs up past research which has promoted the benefits of the diet.

The Mediterranean diet is typically high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and olive oil, while low in red meats and moderate in dairy, fish and poultry.

Dr Nita Forouhi, lead author from the University of Cambridge, said: “We estimate that one in 25 of all new cardiovascular disease cases or one in eight cardiovascular deaths in our UK based study population could potentially be avoided if this population increased their adherence to the Mediterranean diet.”

Dr Forouhi’s team collected data from 23,902 health Brits.

Their diets were measured using questionnaires and followed up for 12 to 17 years.

Dr Forouhi added: “The benefits of the Mediterranean diet for cardiovascular health are well documented in countries of the Mediterranean region, but this is the first study to evaluate this in the UK.

“If our findings are broadly representative of the overall UK population, then we can assume that higher level of adherence to the Mediterranean diet could have significant impact in lowering the cardiovascular disease burden in the UK.

“Our study shows that higher versus lower adherence to a Mediterranean-type diet is linked with lower future CVD risk in the UK but our challenge now is to understand the social, economic and cultural factors that might support or prevent people being able to keep to this dietary pattern in the UK.”

British Heart Foundation dietitian Tracy Parker, said: “This large study adds to the significant body of evidence showing that eating a Mediterranean-style diet can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

“For those wanting to follow a Mediterranean diet, the Government’s healthy eating advice set out in its ‘Eatwell Guide’ is similar and shows how much you should eat of each food groups to have a healthy balanced diet.

“This includes eating plenty of starchy foods, such as bread and pasta, plenty of fruit and vegetables, eating some fish, less meat, and choosing products made from vegetable and plant oils, such as olive oil.

“However, eating healthily isn’t enough on its own. Importantly, the researchers found that those with high adherence to the diet were less likely to be smokers and more likely to be physically active – both important independent factors in reducing a person’s risk of cardiovascular disease.”

The findings come as the [British Heart Foundation launches it’s new Heart Age Tool](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/1874939/heart-attack-test/), in partnership with Public Health England and NHS Choices.

The tool, developed in part by BHF professor John Deanfield, helps people find out their “heart age” compared with their chronological age.

It comes as new research shows 80 per cent of people over the age of 30, have a heart that is prematurely ageing.

The test assesses a person’s risk of heart attack and stroke, taking into account their age, lifestyle, cholesterol and blood pressure.

Research has shown that telling people their heart age, and the steps they can take to lower it, is an effective way of motivating people to change their behaviour with the potential for long-term improvements in heart health.