

INSPIRED

To Make Healthy Choices

We know that eating whole foods (foods as close to its natural form rather than processed) provide more nutrients that our bodies need to be healthy and fight disease.

New research has also shown that certain nutrients working together can create greater health effects. This is called food synergy.

The Mediterranean-style diet is a perfect example of food synergy, because it includes several healthful food patterns. It's rich in plant foods, whole grains, vegetables and fish; low in meat and dairy products; and contains more monounsaturated than saturated fats due to its emphasis on olives, olive oil and walnuts. A recent study concluded that the Mediterranean diet may reduce the prevalence of both metabolic syndrome (a condition that includes excess body fat, high blood fats and high blood pressure) and the cardiovascular risk that goes along with it. Another study found that a Mediterranean diet was associated with a 23% lower risk of early death from all causes.

Here are some examples in which different nutrients and components in food work together:

- Three B vitamins (folic acid, Vitamin B-6 and B-12) TOGETHER reduce the level of an amino acid that, in high levels, is thought to damage artery linings, leading to heart attacks and strokes.
- A recent study found that the phytochemicals quercetin (found mainly in apples, onions and berries) and catechin (found mainly in apples, green tea, purple grapes and grape juice) worked together to help stop platelet clumping. Platelets clumping together is one of several steps in blood clotting that can lead to a heart attack.

For more information:
NUTRIENTS WORKING TOGETHER
www.guideinc.org

- A recent Ohio State University study showed that salads eaten with full-fat dressings help with the absorption of another carotenoid called lutein, which is found in green leafy vegetables and has been shown to benefit vision. If you don't like heavy salad dressing, sprinkle walnuts, pistachios or grated cheese over your greens.
- "Vitamin C helps make plant-based iron more absorbable," says nutritionist Stacy Kennedy of the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. It actually converts much of the plant-based iron into a form that's similar to what is found in fish and red meats. Vitamin C-rich foods, like red bell pepper, can increase the absorption of non-heme iron by six times. Black beans are good sources of iron. Consider black bean tacos topped with sautéed red bell peppers to increase the iron absorption.
- Sodium and potassium also work together. Excess sodium interferes with the natural ability of blood vessels to relax and expand, increasing blood pressure—and increasing the chances of having a stroke or heart attack. Potassium encourages the kidneys to excrete sodium, reducing the excess.

Other studied combinations include

green tea and black pepper, turmeric and black pepper, whole grains with onions and garlic, tomatoes and olive oil, salmon with collard greens, brussel sprouts and olive oil and kale with almonds. Food synergy can be as easy as preparing a chicken dish that's made with turmeric and adding a little black pepper or cooking your fish with a little garlic.

Want to know more about food synergy?

Check out health.com, rd.com or webmd.com.

Becoming intentional about pairing foods that work together will positively impact your health. Bon appetit!

