

Maximum Wellness 6.24.2020

Healthy Eating Patterns Reduce the Risk to Cardiovascular Disease

On June 15,th 2020, NBC News reported that death rates are 12 times higher for coronavirus patients with chronic illnesses compared to healthier individuals, who became infected.” Citing a Center for Disease Control and Prevention report, the top three chronic health issues found with Covid-19 patients were heart disease, diabetes, and lung ailments.

On the same day of the NBC News report, JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association) Internal Medicine published a study - Association Between Healthy Eating Patterns and Risk of Cardiovascular Disease – which determined that, “in 3 large prospective cohorts, greater adherence to various dietary patterns was associated with lower CVD (cardiovascular disease) risk.”

The healthy dietary patterns were taken from the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans that, “highlight a shift from focusing on individual nutrients or foods to emphasizing healthy eating patterns, as a whole, and recommend multiple healthy dietary patterns to provide dietary choices for all Americans with diverse cultural and personal food traditions or preferences.”

According to Health.gov, “the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* provides five overarching Guidelines that encourage healthy eating patterns, recognize that individuals will need to make shifts in their food and beverage choices to achieve a healthy pattern, and acknowledge that all segments of our society have a role to play in supporting healthy choices.”

These Guidelines, notes the website, “also embody the idea that a healthy eating pattern is not a rigid prescription, but rather, an adaptable framework in which individuals can enjoy foods that meet their personal, cultural, and traditional preferences and fit within their budget.”

Those healthy dietary guidelines include:

Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan

Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount

Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake

Shift to healthier food and beverage choices

Support healthy eating patterns for all

The healthy eating patterns include consuming vegetables from all sub-groups – dark green, red and orange, beans and peas, starchy and other; fruits, especially whole fruits; grains, at least half of which are whole grains; fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages; a variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, and nuts, seeds, and soy products; and healthy oils like olive and canola, while limiting saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium.

To reach the conclusion that these healthy eating guidelines and food patterns would reduce CVD risk, Harvard University researchers and others, including members from the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, used data from the Nurses' Health Study (NHS) from 1984-2016, NHS II from 1991-2017, and Health Professionals Follow-up Study (HPFS) 1986-2012.

The NHS is a prospective cohort study of 121,700 female registered nurses aged 30 to 55 years that began in 1976. The NHS II was established in 1989 and consists of 116,671 younger female registered nurses, aged 25 to 42 years. The HPFS is a prospective cohort study of 51,529 male health professionals aged 40 to 75 years that began in 1986.

Among other criteria, dietary information was collected every 2 to 4 years. Participants were asked how often, on average, they consumed a standard portion size of each food in the past year – with a frequency response ranging from never or less than 1 time per month to at least 6 times per day.

In order to assess the frequency of CVD, which was defined as fatal and nonfatal CHD (including nonfatal myocardial infarction), participants were asked to report an incident event on each biennial questionnaire. Then, permission was requested to examine medical records, which were reviewed by study investigators blinded to the participant's risk factor status.

The researchers concluded that, “our findings support the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommend multiple healthy eating patterns for individuals to adapt according to personal food traditions and preferences.”