

What is the Atlantic diet and how does it stack up against the Mediterranean diet?



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Chances are, you're familiar with the well-researched [Mediterranean diet](#). And perhaps you've even heard of the [Nordic](#) and Okinawan diets.

These traditional eating patterns, based on local, fresh and minimally processed foods, have been tied to numerous health benefits and longevity.

You might not, however, be acquainted with the Atlantic diet, a cousin of the Mediterranean diet that's attracting attention.

According to new research, following this dietary pattern can guard against metabolic syndrome, a cluster of risk factors that, when they appear together, dramatically raises the risk of heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes. It's estimated that one in five Canadian adults has metabolic syndrome.

Here's a guide to the Atlantic diet and a breakdown of the latest study – plus how the Atlantic diet and Mediterranean diet compare.

What's in the Atlantic diet?

The Atlantic diet, also called the South European Atlantic diet, is the traditional eating pattern of northwestern Spain and northern Portugal.

Daily foods include fruits and vegetables, potatoes, whole grain breads and cereals, nuts, dairy products and olive oil.

The diet also includes moderate amounts of fish and seafood, especially cod, beef, pork, poultry and eggs. Three to four servings of pulses (e.g., beans and lentils) are consumed each week.

Fatty meats, sweets and soft drinks are eaten sparingly, not more than monthly.

Soups and stews can often be found on an Atlantic diet menu.

Mineral water is consumed often during the day. Wine is consumed moderately, typically with meals.

The Atlantic diet study

The latest findings, published Feb. 7 in the journal JAMA Network Open, come from the GALIAT Study, a six-month randomized controlled trial that investigated the effect of the traditional Atlantic diet on metabolic health in families living in A Estrada, a town in northwestern Spain. (GALIAT stands for Galicia Atlantic Diet.)

The researchers studied 231 families, a total of 518 participants with an average age of 47.

Half the families were assigned to follow the traditional Atlantic diet and the remaining served as the control group.

Participants in the Atlantic diet group received educational sessions on how to modify their eating habits, a cooking class, written materials and a recipe book.

They also received free food baskets, delivered once every three weeks, that contained traditional Atlantic diet foods including turnip greens, cabbage, tomatoes, mussels, low fat cheese, olive oil and wine.

Control group participants were advised to maintain their usual lifestyle.

Among participants who did not have metabolic syndrome at the start of the study, after six months those who ate the Atlantic diet had a significantly lower risk of developing the syndrome compared with control group participants.

Participants were diagnosed with metabolic syndrome if they had three of the following five risk factors: 1) a waist circumference greater than 40 inches for men or greater than 34.5 inches for women, 2) elevated blood triglycerides (fats), 3) a low blood HDL (good) cholesterol, 4) elevated blood pressure and 5) a fasting blood glucose of 6.2 mmol/L or higher.

The Atlantic diet also reduced waist circumference and improved HDL cholesterol.

As well, compared to the control group, the Atlantic diet group was 42 per cent less likely to develop an additional risk factor for metabolic syndrome over the six months.

This isn't the first study to credit the Atlantic diet with potential health benefits. Previous research has suggested that adhering to the eating pattern promotes weight loss, reduces LDL cholesterol and blood triglycerides, lowers blood pressure, dampens inflammation, improves insulin sensitivity and protects against heart attack and depression.

Strengths, limitations

A strong point was the study's randomized design, which allowed it to assess cause and effect.

It's possible, though, that unknown factors not measured influenced the risk of developing metabolic syndrome.

All study participants were of Spanish or white European descent. Whether the Atlantic diet would benefit ethnic groups at increased risk for metabolic syndrome isn't known.

Participants received free food baskets so the findings might not apply to groups with food access challenges.

The Mediterranean diet versus the Atlantic diet

A distinct difference between these two traditional [diets](#) revolves around red meat.

The Mediterranean diet treats red meat as a “sometimes” food to be eaten in small portions only a few times a month. A moderate amount of red meat can be included in the Atlantic diet.

It's the similarities of these two eating patterns, though, that are important for maintaining good health.

Both are centred on daily intake of nutrient-dense plant foods such as vegetables and fruit, whole grains, beans and lentils, nuts and olive oil. And both include a moderate amount of fish and seafood.

Both eating patterns also promote social and cultural aspects of healthy eating – cooking meals at home, mindful eating, sharing meals with family – as well as daily physical activity.

Follow these principles and you'll end up with a healthy eating plan.

Leslie Beck's tips for healthy living

- THE BEST OVERALL DIET:

Anti-inflammatory eating patterns like the Mediterranean or DASH diets can fight inflammation in the body, lowering the chance of it contributing to a host of chronic illnesses.

- GET ENOUGH PROTEIN:

Protein is a muscle-building, wound-healing nutrient that can help boost your immune system. For optimal health, distribute your protein intake throughout the day, add plant-based options such as beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, whole grains and dairy alternatives such as soy milk to your diet and pay extra attention if you're over 65.

- VEGETABLES TO EAT:

Three vegetable and two fruit servings a day is the secret to longevity. Try a fruit-rich smoothie at breakfast, chop kale, spinach or other dark green leafy vegetables into a soup or stir-fry at dinner, and trade the ultra-processed options like a granola bar for nourishing snacks like carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, bell pepper strips, broccoli and mushrooms with hummus. Is your diet missing any of these 25 longevity-boosting foods?

- EAT CHEAP (AND HEALTHY)

Here's how to find the cheapest sources of nutrition, plus more tips to save on groceries. Make at-home meals easier by keeping your pantry stocked and your freezer full of healthy options like edamame, green peas and avocado.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/article-atlantic-mediterranean-diet-comparison-benefits/#:~:text=The%20diet%20also%20includes%20moderate,sparingly%2C%20not%20more%20than%20monthly.>



https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Atlantic-Diet-Pyramid-according-to-Tojo-and-Leis-2009-and-translated-from-Spanish_fig1_311594226

The Mediterranean vs. Nordic diet: Which plant-based eating pattern is healthiest?



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Should you eat like a Viking or a gladiator? Perhaps both.

You're probably familiar with the Mediterranean diet, a collection of foods traditionally consumed by people living in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. It's been linked to a wide range of health benefits including a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease and depression.

You may not have heard of the Nordic diet, though. It's another traditional way of eating that's gaining popularity for its similar health advantages and culinary appeal.

The Nordic diet, with roots dating back to the Viking age, was revitalized in 2004 by a group of researchers, dietitians and chefs in an effort to promote nutritious seasonal Nordic foods to people living in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

What's in the Nordic diet?

Like the Mediterranean diet, the Nordic diet is predominately plant-based with plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and pulses, moderate amounts of fish, poultry and eggs, small amounts of dairy and limited red meat.

It emphasizes whole and minimally processed foods that are sourced locally, which reduces energy consumption and minimizes food waste. (The longer foods spend in storage and transit, the greater the chance of spoilage.)

Where the Nordic diet differs, though, is in its ingredients. The foods included are ones that are optimally grown or raised in the Nordic climate, soil and waters.

Vegetables include root vegetables (potatoes, carrots, beets, turnips), cruciferous vegetables (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage) and green peas. Berries (lingonberries), apples, pears and plums are the predominant fruits.

Nordic menus feature steel-cut oats, whole grain barley, and breads and crackers made with whole grain rye. Herring, mackerel, sardines and salmon, rich in omega-3 fats, as well as leaner white fish, are regularly eaten.

Lean game meats such as elk, bison, deer, venison and caribou are enjoyed occasionally. Skyr, an Icelandic-made yogurt that's high in protein (25 grams per cup) and low in fat, is also eaten.

The diet also includes fermented fish, vegetables and dairy (kefir), foods that offer gut-friendly probiotic bacteria. Dill, parsley and fennel add flavour and protective antioxidants to meals.

A notable difference between the Nordic and Mediterranean diets is the type of cooking oil used. In southern Europe, extra virgin olive oil is the principal fat; the Nordic diet emphasizes rapeseed oil (a.k.a. canola oil).

Both oils are excellent sources of heart-healthy unsaturated fats. Canola oil contains alpha linolenic acid, an anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acid, while extra virgin olive oil provides other beneficial phytochemicals.

Health benefits of Nordic eating

The Nordic diet is newer than the Mediterranean diet, so fewer studies have been conducted to explore its health benefits. Still, the evidence to date is promising.

Last year, a review of research conducted by the World Health Organization concluded that both the Mediterranean and Nordic diets protect against Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Adhering to a Nordic diet has also been shown to lower elevated blood pressure and blood cholesterol, reduce inflammation in the body and promote weight loss.

Four Nordic staples to add to your diet

You don't have to live in Northern Europe to embrace a Nordic-style diet. Include the following foods in your regular diet; when possible, choose local foods.

Whole grain rye bread. Dense rye bread made with rye meal, rye kernels and/or whole grain rye flour is a good source of fibre and lignans, phytochemicals with anti-cancer properties. Traditional pumpernickel and rye breads are also made with a sourdough starter, which gives them a low glycemic index. Also eat: whole grain rye crackers, steel-cut oats, whole grain spelt, and hulled barley.

Cabbage. This cruciferous vegetable is an excellent source of vitamin C as well as fibre, calcium, potassium, bone-building vitamin K and anti-cancer compounds called glucosinolates. Also eat: broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower.

Potatoes. This root vegetable serves up vitamin C, plenty of vitamin B6, folate and magnesium, and a lot more potassium than a banana (926 mg for a medium baked potato). Also eat: turnip, rutabaga, carrots, radishes, onions.

Sardines. This fatty fish delivers plenty of protein, anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats, calcium and selenium, an antioxidant mineral. Also eat: herring, mackerel and salmon.

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<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/article-the-mediterranean-diet-has-competition-from-the-nordic-diet/>