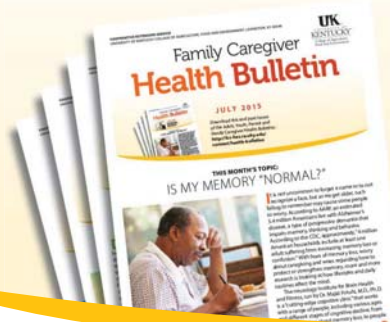


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



**JUNE 2016**

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K-State Research & Extension  
Atchison County Office  
405 Main/PO Box 109  
Effingham, KS 66023  
913-833-5450  
[www.atchison.ksu.edu](http://www.atchison.ksu.edu)

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: MEDITERRANEAN DIET



Caregiving is associated with a lot of social, emotional, physical and financial responsibilities. As a result, caregivers often neglect their health in taking care of somebody else. Embracing a Mediterranean diet is just one approach to help you stay both physically and mentally strong.

The Mediterranean diet includes lots of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. In addition, it promotes healthy fats that can be found in fish, nuts, seeds and olive oil. Overall, the Mediterranean diet is low in refined sugar and saturated fat, which is associated with dairy and meat. In particular, the Mediterranean diet does not include a lot of red meat.

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# Embracing a Mediterranean diet is just one approach to help you stay both physically and mentally strong.

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The Mediterranean diet includes foods rich in Omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3s are fats that your body needs to function. They are found primarily in fish, nuts and seeds. The following list includes recommended foods associated with the Mediterranean diet according to AgingCare.com (2016):

- Arugula
- Baba Ghanoush
- Couscous
- Falafel
- Feta cheese
- Hummus
- Mousakka
- Olives
- Paella
- Pesto
- Pita bread
- Red wine
- Salmon
- Spinach
- Tahini
- Whole grains

In addition to function, Omega-3s also have major health benefits. The overall health benefits associated with the Mediterranean diet include:

- **Decreased frailty.** Adults who eat healthier are better able to control joint stiffness associated with arthritis, walk better/faster, enhance muscle strength, experience less exhaustion and decrease the risk of falling.
- **Reduced risk for developing chronic illnesses.** Healthy eating is connected to reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, oral health issues, cancer, arthritis, eye disorders such as macular degeneration, and Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Some studies have connected the Mediterranean diet to helping people manage asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- **Brain protection.** Researchers believe that a healthy diet and lifestyle can improve cholesterol and blood sugar levels and overall blood vessel health, which may in turn reduce the risk of brain disorders including Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and Alzheimer's disease. Additional research suggests that a Mediterranean diet may help prevent brain tissue loss associated with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

In addition to food, caregivers should embrace the Mediterranean diet because the diet also promotes a healthy lifestyle which contributes to overall well-being. For example, people living in the Mediterranean region are associated with:

- Embracing a physically active lifestyle
- Eating smaller portions
- Eating slower
- Reducing negative stress
- Maintaining strong social ties
- Enjoying the company of and laughing with family and friends during meals
- Drinking a glass (women) or two (men) of red wine with dinner
- Laughing

As a caregiver, take care of yourself by embracing the Mediterranean diet and associated lifestyle behaviors. As possible, it can be beneficial and may even be fun to include the person for whom you are giving care. Together you can strengthen your relationship and maybe even laugh more or reduce stress by doing something as simple as researching recipes, cooking and eating a healthy meal or snack together.

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**Written by:** Amy Hosier, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist for Family Life  
**Edited by:** Connee Wheeler  
**Designed by:** Rusty Manseau  
**Stock images:** 123RF.com

