

## The Mediterranean Diet: Helping Protect the Elderly from Peripheral Artery Disease

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, April 27, 2006, abstracted from "Association between nutrient intake and peripheral artery disease: Results from the InCHIANTI study" in the May 2006 issue of the *Atherosclerosis*

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Defined as "a highly prevalent and...ominous condition",<sup>1</sup> Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD) currently affects nearly 12 million Americans. Although The most common symptom is cramping, pain or tiredness in the leg or hip muscles while walking or climbing stairs and then goes away with rest, as many of 75% of people with PAD don't have any symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

Because smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes are risk factors for PAD and high HDL cholesterol protects against PAD,<sup>3</sup> research has started to find small ways to help protect yourself against PAD. These include consuming moderate amounts of alcohol,<sup>4</sup> vitamin C supplementation,<sup>5</sup> and calorie restriction.<sup>6</sup> Now a new study<sup>7</sup> has found modifying your diet to mirror the Mediterranean Diet (MD) may provide the greatest protection of all against PAD.

Because it is characterized by high consumption of olive oil, fish, nuts and fruits and vegetables, the MD not only [increases antioxidant levels](#)<sup>8</sup> and [decreases obesity](#),<sup>9</sup> but it has also been found to decrease mortality by 23 percent<sup>10</sup> and decrease the risk of [Metabolic Syndrome](#).<sup>11</sup> This condition affects one in four Americans and is characterized by increased blood sugar, elevated fats in the blood, obesity, and elevated blood pressure.<sup>12</sup>

In the study, 1250 patients with an average age of 68 years who participated in the InCHIANTI study<sup>13</sup> submitted a nutrition questionnaire<sup>14</sup> while researchers measured blood pressure, cholesterol and blood flow in the lower limbs.

The researchers found that the 10% of patients with PAD were on average 10 years older than those without PAD, had a higher exposure to cigarette smoking, higher blood pressure and levels of inflammation. They also consumed less alcohol and had higher concentrations of total cholesterol with lower HDL cholesterol.

When it came to diet, PAD patients consumed, on average, 100 more calories per day (2036 vs. 1904 calories per day). Of the many nutritional factors studied, some notable results found were consuming more than 7.7 mg of vitamin E, 24 grams of fiber, 144 mg of vitamin C, and 8 grams of polyunsaturated fat per day reduced PAD risk by 62%, 37%, 39%, and 53%, respectively.

For the researchers, "A higher intake of vegetable [fats], Vitamin E and higher...HDL cholesterol characterize subjects free from PAD."

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