

Yes please to yoghurt and cheese: The new improved Mediterranean diet

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Thousands of Australians can take heart as new research from the University of South Australia shows a dairy-enhanced Mediterranean diet will significantly increase health outcomes for those at risk of

cardiovascular disease – and it's even more effective than a low-fat diet.

Cardiovascular disease is the single leading cause of death in Australia, affecting 4.2 million Australians and killing one Australian every 12 minutes. Low-fat diets are often recommended as suitable food plans for those seeking to reduce their risk factors for [cardiovascular disease](#). Similarly, the Mediterranean [diet](#) (MedDiet) has been shown to deliver significant health benefits.

In this UniSA study, published by the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers compared the health benefits of a MedDiet supplemented with two to three serves of [dairy](#) each day, and a generic low-fat diet.

The results show that the dairy-supplemented MedDiet (MedDairy) significantly improved blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol, mood and cognitive function.

Ph.D. candidate Alexandra Wade says the new MedDairy diet challenges popular perceptions of what is considered healthy.

"The MedDiet is fast earning a reputation as the world's healthiest diet and is renowned for delivering improved cardiovascular and cognitive health," Wade says.

"But it's also higher in fat, which can be a deterrent for people seeking to adopt a healthier eating plan, especially if they don't realise the difference between healthy and unhealthy fats.

"In Australia, low-fat diets are often recommended for improving heart health and they are still perceived as being healthy.

"This study shows that the new MedDairy works better than a generic

low-fat diet, ensuring better [health outcomes](#) for people at [risk of cardiovascular disease](#)."

Importantly, the MedDairy diet also meets additional calcium requirements recommended by Australia's national health bodies.

A typical MedDiet includes extra virgin [olive oil](#), fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, wholegrain breads, pastas and cereals, moderate consumption of fish and red wine, and low consumption of red meat, sweet and processed foods. It also includes 1-2 servings of dairy foods (700-820mg calcium), which is less than half the dairy recommended by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for older Australians.

"Living in Australia, we have different dietary requirements, notably a need for more calcium to protect against osteoporosis," Wade says.

"These needs are unmet in the traditional MedDiet, which makes it difficult for people to adopt in the long term.

"This study delivers healthier options for Australians by tailoring the nutrients in the MedDiet to meet the needs of a non-Mediterranean population.

"In Australia, women up to age 50 years – and men up to age 70 years – should consume 1000mg per day of calcium per day and 1300mg thereafter, which is roughly between 3.5 and 4.5 serves a day.

"The new MedDairy diet allows for three to four servings with dairy, which means Australians can more sustainably meet their recommended daily nutrient intakes while also maintaining the significant health benefits offered through the MedDiet.

"When it comes down to it, people want to be able to enjoy a colourful, tasty and nutritious diet. And if you're one of the thousands of people seeking to improve your cardiovascular and cognitive [health](#) – look no further than the MedDairy diet."

More information: Alexandra T Wade et al. A Mediterranean diet supplemented with dairy foods improves markers of cardiovascular risk: results from the MedDairy randomized controlled trial, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/ajcn/nqy207](https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqy207)

Provided by University of South Australia

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