

Dietary predictors of survival amongst Greeks in Melbourne

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The elderly are a growing segment of the population in Australia. The Committee on Nutrition and Ageing of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS), in cooperation with the World Health Organization has undertaken a cross cultural study 'Food Habits in Later Life' (1). As part of the project, data on food intake and anthropometric measurements of 189 (91 men and 91 women) Greeks in Melbourne, aged 70 years and over, were recorded between January 1990 and December 1992. Subjects were defined as Greek–Australian if they had been born in Greece or if both their parents had been born in Greece. The death of 24 subjects was confirmed in April 1996. The aim of this longitudinal study was to evaluate the role of diet in survival of elderly Greeks in Melbourne.

Data on food intake were collected using a validated, extensive (250 food items and beverages) food-frequency questionnaire (1). The frequency of consumption of different food items was quantified on a weekly basis. Food items were translated into gram/day and grouped into several main food groups. For comparison purposes with other IUNS elderly cohorts (2), each food group was adjusted to 2500 kcal for men and 2000 kcal for women. The Cox Proportional Hazards regression was used to analyze the data. The Cox's models were developed and controlled for sex, age at enrolment, and smoking status.

| Variables | P value | RR |
|---|---------|-------|
| Vegetable intake (20g) | 0.460 | 1.021 |
| Legume intake (20g) | 0.810 | 0.982 |
| Fruit and nut intake (20g)** | 0.004 | 0.883 |
| Cereal intake (20g) | 0.300 | 0.953 |
| Dairy intake (20g) | 0.700 | 0.991 |
| Meat intake (20g) | 0.380 | 0.950 |
| Fish intake (20g) | 0.870 | 1.013 |
| Monounsaturated:saturated ratio (1unit) | 0.099 | 0.348 |
| Ethanol intake (10g) | 0.380 | 1.155 |

**P < 0.01.

A 20g increase in daily consumption of fruits and nuts was significantly associated with reduced risk of death by 12% (P < 0.05). The mean (SD) intake of fruits and nuts was 252g/day (136). In conclusion, the intakes of fruits and nuts may have beneficial effects on survival of elderly Greeks aged 70 and over in Melbourne.

1. Wahlqvist ML, Hsu-Hage BH-H, Kouris-Blazos A, Lukito W et al. Food Habits in Later Life. A cross-cultural study. United Nations University Press, 1995.
2. Trichopoulou A, Kouris-Blazos A, Wahlqvist ML, Gnardellis C, Lagiou P, Polychronopoulos E, Vassilakou T, Lipworth L, Trichopoulos D. Diet and overall survival in elderly people. *BMJ* 1995; 311: 1457–1460.