

Int'l Mediterranean Diet Month: Making the case for a healthy diet as a tool for diabetes prevention

Your patients have been made well aware through such things as social media, family, friends and marketing that a healthy diet can contribute to significant improvements in health. Several studies have also revealed that healthy diets can not only prevent type 2 diabetes, but can also improve cholesterol levels, reduce hypertension and decrease heart disease.

Yet the statistics indicate there's still a disconnect for patients. More than 84 million U.S. people have prediabetes—that's 1 in 3 adults—and 9 out of 10 people don't know they have the condition, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This May, International Mediterranean Diet Month, presents an opportunity to educate patients on the benefits of a healthy diet and how it can help reduce their risk for type 2 diabetes and other chronic disease.

Benefits of a Mediterranean diet

The Mediterranean diet is a healthy approach to eating that people from countries around the Mediterranean practice. Key elements of the Mediterranean diet highlight eating mostly plant-based foods which include:

- Fruits
- Veggies
- Nuts
- Legumes
- Whole grains

The diet does not limit fat consumption but instead encourages making better decisions when choosing what types of fats to eat. It does emphasize monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Healthy fats such as olive oil, for example are substituted for butter. Herbs and spices, which can promote health, replace salt as seasoning. The Mediterranean diet also encourages limiting red meat consumption to a few times a month, while eating fish and poultry twice weekly, drinking red wine in moderation and incorporating regular exercise.

Following a Mediterranean diet has been found to reduce heart attacks, strokes, and certain types of cancers. It can also lower LDL cholesterol, and may help in the prevention of other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes.

Even if patients don't practice the Mediterranean diet, a diet that incorporates more plant-based foods can prove beneficial.

Offering tips for nutrition

To help patients understand the positive impact that lifestyle changes such as eating more fruits and vegetables can have on their health, especially in the prevention of type 2 diabetes, it's important that they be aware of their risk for prediabetes.

Screening your patients with the [online prediabetes risk test](#) allows you to [perform additional blood tests and then refer](#) your patients to a National Diabetes Prevention (DPP) lifestyle change program in their community or online. DPPs have been proven to empower patients to make lifestyle changes that become habits, including dietary improvements and increased physical activity in support of their health.

You can also start the conversation around healthy eating with the help of an [online CME nutrition course](#) offered by the American Medical Association in partnership with the Gaples Institute for Integrative Cardiology. The course will arm you with the information you need to talk with your patients about their nutrition needs.