

Health benefits and social determinants of the Mediterranean diet at a time of economic crisis : results from the moli-sani study

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CHAPTER 14. SUMMARY

A large body of evidence has been linking the traditional Mediterranean diet to reduced risk of major chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease, tumors and also neurodegenerative disease.

As largely described by the pioneering investigations on this topic, this dietary model is mainly characterized by abundance of fruit and vegetables, non-refined grains, cereals, nuts, legumes, fish, olive oil as main fat sources and moderate wine consumption preferably during meals.

However, the dietary behaviors of populations have been radically changing since the original definition of this eating pattern and many problematic nutritional aspects emerged. Basically, the foods we eat today are different from what the traditional Mediterranean populations used to have. This thesis addresses whether adherence to a Mediterranean-style diet is still available to convey health advantages both for apparently healthy subjects and for groups at high cardiovascular risk.

In addition, late evidence has been suggesting that Mediterranean societies are rapidly withdrawing from this eating pattern orienting their food choices toward products typical of the Western diet pattern. Among possible causes, the increasing cost of many key-foods of the Mediterranean diet is likely to have led people to give up this eating pattern in favor of less expensive products which allow to save money but are definitively unhealthy. Additionally, there is reason to believe that the economic downturn is going to produce unfavorable effects on the dietary lifestyle of people, especially among the less wealthy groups. Thus, the second part of this thesis focuses on the role of either material or cultural resources in determining the conformity to the Mediterranean diet and also analyzes their accounting for the dramatic decrease of the adherence recorded in the latest years. Consistently, the thesis discusses whether the economic crisis could be considered as one of the likely causes to explain the shifting from this healthy dietary pattern.

As far as the valorization of this thesis is concerned, several points have been mentioned including the cost effectiveness of the Mediterranean diet and its cultural and planet-saving dimension (as recently recognized by UNESCO).