

Mediterranean diet components could prevent pancreatitis

By [Kathleen Blanchard RN](#) on December 27, 2011 - 7:31pm

Researchers know fish oil and virgin olive oil are both good for health. Now researchers have discovered that virgin olive oil and fatty acids in fish that are components of a Mediterranean diet can protect from acute pancreatitis.

The disease is simply inflammation of the pancreas, which can strike both children and adults. Pancreatitis can be mild and self-limiting, but severe cases can lead to multi system organ failure and death.

A significant number of cases are from chronic alcohol abuse. Gallstones can also lead to acute pancreatitis because they block the flow of digestive enzymes. Other causes include some medications. Examples are ACE inhibitors which are a class of blood pressure medicine, thiazide diuretics (e.g. HCTZ), steroids and the anti-seizure drug valproic acid.

Excessively high triglycerides can also inflame the pancreas that produces symptoms of epigastric pain and tenderness, fever, nausea and vomiting and abdominal bloating.

For their research, Scientists at the [University of Granada](#) were able to show that oleic acid and hydroxytyrosol, which is found in high levels in virgin olive oil, and fish fatty acids, relieve symptoms of pancreatitis.

In this study the researchers observed how the fatty acids affect the cellular membrane to reduce oxidative damage and inflammation to relieve symptoms of pancreatitis, using in vitro models.

Study author, María Belén López Millán says, "There is increasing evidence that there are oxidative-inflammatory processes involved in the origin of chronic diseases and that diet plays an important role in such processes. The antioxidant (phenolic compounds) and anti-inflammatory (omega-3 fatty acids) effects of diet components (nutrients and bioactive compounds) prevent/mitigate the pathological incidence of oxidative-inflammatory processes".

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Virgin olive oil and fish are part of a Mediterranean diet, that has been well studied for its health benefits. Millán says the finding that virgin olive oil ingredients and fatty acids from fish can help prevent and alleviate pancreatitis; published in the [journal Proceedings of the Nutrition Society](#), provides scientific evidence of how components of the Mediterranean diet work to promote better health.

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