

**LANDMARK TRIAL FINAL RESULTS: MEDITERRANEAN DIET + A HANDFUL OF NUTS
REDUCES RISK OF HEART DISEASE AND STROKE**

A Mediterranean diet including nuts reduces the risk of cardiovascular events* by 28% (P=0.03) and in particular the risk of stroke by 46% (P=0.006) when compared to a control diet, according to new findings by one of the world's largest and longest dietary intervention studies¹.

The final results of the landmark Spanish PREDIMED (PREvención con Dieta MEDiterranea) trial - a multicentre, randomised, primary prevention trial of cardiovascular disease funded by the Spanish Ministry of Health - were published online in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine late last night.

One of the key researchers Prof Jordi Salas Salvado, who visited Australia last year, said the main message from this analysis was people who consume healthy plant based fats from mixed nuts and extra virgin olive oil had a lower risk of coronary events and mortality by cardiovascular diseases.

The Mediterranean diet is a pattern of eating similar to the traditional dietary habits of people living in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. This includes fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, whole grains and nutritious fats, including walnuts and olive oil.

PREDIMED trial included 7,447 people aged 55-80 years old at high cardiovascular risk, who were followed for an average of 3-6 years (median 4.8 years). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups:

- Control diet (advise to reduce dietary fat)
- Mediterranean diet supplemented with virgin olive oil (additional 50 ml per day); or
- Mediterranean diet supplemented with 30 g mixed nuts per day (15 g walnuts, 7.5 g almonds and 7.5 g hazelnuts).

Similar to the benefits of the Mediterranean diet supplemented with nuts, the research found that the Mediterranean diet enriched with extra-virgin olive oil also reduced the risk of cardiovascular events* by 30%.

The researchers observed the benefit in favour of the Mediterranean diet groups occurred early in the trial and continued throughout the follow-up period.

Overall eating a Mediterranean diet (which includes both olive oil and mixed nuts) resulted in a reduced risk of cardiovascular events* by 29% (P=0.005). Regardless of sex and age, body mass index (BMI) and other cardiovascular risk factors.

Heart disease is the number one killer of Australian men and women and is responsible for around 22,000 deaths every year².

When in Australia recently, PREDIMED co-investigator Dr Emilio Ros said there was more science supporting the protective qualities of nuts than any other whole food.

"There are the six large observational studies consistently showing heart disease protection with increasing nut intake, and there have been 30 or more short to medium term clinical trials consistently showing that nut diets, including any variety of nut, lower blood cholesterol⁵," said Dr Ros.

***Cardiovascular events includes: stroke, heart attack and death from cardiovascular disease.**

"We recommend 30g of nuts a day, which is around a handful, as this is the amount of nuts that we have consistently demonstrated beneficially effects heart disease risk factors.

"Increasing nut consumption is very important. I think Australia should strive for the majority of the population to eat a handful of nuts a day, not only for protection from heart disease but diabetes, hypertension, and other general health problems."

The PREDIMED findings follow last week's release of the new Australian Dietary Guidelines, which for the first time distinguished between 'good' and 'bad' fats calling on Australians to switch unhealthy saturated and trans fats for healthy mono and polyunsaturated fats such as those found in nuts and avocados³. The modeling documents that underpin the new Guidelines also highlighted that Australian adults needed to increase their nut consumption by 350% to meet the recommended handful (30g) of nuts.⁴

Advanced Accredited Practising Dietitian and Nuts for Life Program Manager Ms Lisa Yates said the PREDIMED study added to the body of evidence and confirmed eating a handful (30g) of nuts regularly was beneficial for reducing the risk of adverse events from cardiovascular disease.

"It is satisfying to see that the NHMRC Australia Dietary Guidelines now acknowledge the important role nuts play in the diet by recommending a regular 30g handful of nuts. This latest revision of the dietary guidelines puts the final nail in the coffin of low-fat diets as the preferred option for a healthy diet. At last healthy fat foods are back on the menu," said Ms Yates.

Nuts for Life is the Australian tree nut industry's nutrition education initiative. For more tips on including nuts in your diet, recipes and nutrition information visit www.nutsforlife.com.au

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Issued on behalf of Nuts for Life

Nuts for Life is a nutrition communications initiative of the Australian Tree Nut Industry and Horticulture Australia to provide information about the nutrition and health benefits of tree nuts.

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References

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