

The Italian Mediterranean Model, based on the Mediterranean diet, is studied and admired all over the world, not only for the exceptional quality of its many typical products (the so-called "Made in Italy"), but also for the benefits deriving from it in terms of health of the population.

The Mediterranean diet, a classic example of a healthy and sustainable diet, has been identified by UNESCO as a part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2010. Much more than just a list of foods, the Mediterranean diet helps build and enhance social interactions.

Eating together is an important part of Mediterranean culture and plays a vital role in bringing together people of all ages and social classes.

It includes a series of knowledge, rituals and symbols related to the cultivation, harvesting, fishing, breeding, conservation, cooking and above all the sharing of food.

The Mediterranean diet's guidelines for healthy eating do not limit any food products, but specify the recommended amounts for an enjoyable diet that is both varied and balanced. It is a food culture based on education and awareness, not restrictions.

MEDITERRANEAN MODEL



The Mediterranean Model for a Healthy Lifestyle



Traditional and local diets, such as the Mediterranean diet, have been the source of health and well-being for centuries thanks to their centuries-old link with the territory and the seasonality of its resources.

Traditional diets are generally based on a staple diet of fruit, vegetables, cereals and legumes. Meat, fish and traditional dairy products make up the main dishes, whilst edible fats like olive oil are used as condiments.

Cakes and chocolate are eaten as treats or on special occasions.

Preserving the existence of traditional and local diets is therefore important both for ensuring a nutritional balance and for the role they play in the social and cultural fabric of the communities.

TRADITIONAL DIETS



CHANGE IN EATING HABITS

Eating habits and lifestyles have changed radically in the last 50 years, especially in the developed world. High levels of automation have largely reduced physical activity and people are increasingly choosing fast food.

At the same time, illnesses that are in part related to lifestyle and food consumption such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases have increased.

This change in food consumption and lifestyle has contributed decisively to the increase of many diseases such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disorders (the so-called non-communicable diseases).

A phenomenon strengthened by globalization, which has favored the tendency to standardize eating habits in the world, putting at risk the survival of traditional and local diets.

IMPORTANCE OF CLEAR COMMUNICATION

The main instrument by which the food communicates with consumers is the nutritional label. It is therefore important that its indications are clear, simple, objective and informative, so that the consumer can make informed and conscious choices.

This is why it is essential to educate consumers, so that they know what they are consuming.

Providing clear nutritional labelling is therefore a key to forward information that can be quickly and easily understood and which avoids overwhelming consumers with extra symbols that may discourage the consumption of certain food products.

The Italian approach is consistent with the indication of the Political Declaration approved at the 2018 UN High Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases, in which article 34 focuses on the individual and his right to make informed choices (“empower the individual to make informed choices”).

Given that citizens must become more and more aware of the fact that proper nutrition is the first way to prevent diseases, it is necessary to carry out large information campaigns through the media and food education programs from school age.

It is also very important to increase physical activity education in schools and encourage it also in adulthood, because inactivity is one of the main causes of obesity.

HEALTH PROMOTION

In order to promote and protect traditional diets, like the Mediterranean one, Italy founded a “Group of Friends of Healthy and Sustainable Diets” at the United Nations in 2018. It aims to do this by promoting food diversity, the importance of balanced, healthy and sustainable diets, taking into account the importance of food as a part of the cultural heritage. A complex problem like non-communicable diseases, moreover, cannot be solved with a quick fix. The only real lasting solution is a holistic approach, which addresses the problem in all its components. It would be effective to introduce food education programs into schools and to encourage physical activity.

The Mediterranean model shows that a healthy diet, without having to forgo the pleasure of eating pizza, cake or any other food, along with public and personal efforts in food education, contributes to a better quality of life. The demonization of individual foods or certain ingredients is not a convincing solution, because eating in a balanced way does not mean giving up this or that group of foods, but considering them all in their respective appropriate portions and frequency of consumption.

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POSITIVE NUTRITION

Positive nutrition means improving the quality of life, because a healthy diet can coincide with the pleasure and conviviality of a meal.

Eating well does not mean giving up pleasures like a pizza, a dessert or a fry, but limit these treats to certain occasions.

Any food, in the appropriate portions and frequency of consumption, can be included in a varied and balanced diet. Ours is a food culture based on nutritional education and awareness, not on restriction.

The Mediterranean diet is considered to be the healthiest. Italy is the second on the general global health index and the third in the OECD in terms of life expectancy and lower levels of obesity.

