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A newly published study supports the idea that a relatively low-fat, plant-based diet increases quality of life and survival in older adults.

HEALTHY EATING PATTERNS INCREASE SURVIVAL RATES IN OLDER ADULTS

A report published in the January 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* concluded that eating healthy food really does increase survival in older adults.

Researchers analyzed data from 2,582 participants in the Health, Aging and Body Composition Study. Participants were American adults aged 70 to 79 upon enrollment. Dietary questionnaires completed during the second year after enrollment were used to identify 6 predominant dietary patterns: high-fat dairy products, meat, fried foods and alcohol, breakfast cereal, refined grains, sweets and desserts, and healthy foods. The health foods diet was characterized by a higher intake of low-fat dairy products, fruit, whole grains, poultry, fish and vegetables, and reduced consumption of meat, fried foods, sweets, high-calorie drinks and added fat.

During the follow-up period of up to 10 years, 739 deaths occurred in the study group. Those whose diets consisted of healthy food had a significantly lower risk of dying than those whose diets were dominated by high-fat dairy products (ice cream, cheese, whole milk), meat, fried foods and alcohol, sweets, and other desserts. Researchers found a 40 percent greater risk of dying among those who consumed relatively higher amounts of high-fat dairy products, and a 37 percent greater risk for those whose diets were characterized by a lot of sweets.

This study's findings are consistent with current guidelines to consume relatively high amounts of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, poultry, fish, and low-fat dairy products. Diets that follow this pattern appear to be associated with superior nutritional status, improved quality of life, and higher rates of survival in older adults.

Anderson AL, et al. Dietary Patterns and Survival of Older Adults. 2011. Journal of the American Dietetic Association 11(1):84-91.