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## The Mediterranean Diet-Enhancing Skin Health

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### Highlights:

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### How does the Mediterranean Diet improve skin health and help prevent stretch marks?

Eating a diet based on whole grains, beans, and a rainbow of vegetables, especially leafy greens, is optimal for keeping the body and especially skin hydrated. Omega 3 fatty acids found in salmon, tuna, avocados and walnuts hold anti-inflammatory and healing properties that help maintain clear and even-toned skin. Lycopene, found in strong doses in tomato sauce, has been linked to natural sun protection. Zinc, found in yogurt and turkey, is a major source of collagen to keep skin strong and elastic. Whole grains naturally lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which can trigger stretch marks.

By going Mediterranean, you can help minimize the look of stretch marks because you will naturally boost skin's elastin, collagen and moisture levels. Dry skin that lacks suppleness and tone is the perfect canvas for stretch marks. Raw or cooked fresh vegetables, which are healthful complex carbohydrates, are the ideal source of antioxidants, such as Vitamins A, E and C. By fighting free-radicals, these vitamins can help offset the formation of striae, those red, blue or purple lines that develop when skin is stretched to accommodate pregnancy, teen growth spurts, rapid weight gain and rapid muscle development.

### Why is the Mediterranean Diet a Healthy Lifestyle Choice?

The Mediterranean diet has been recognized by health experts around the world as an optimal nutritional model. In 2010, UNESCO recognized the diet as a "Global Intangible Cultural Heritage" with universal value for its contribution to health and culture. Doctors and nutritionists tout the diet for helping prevent many chronic diseases and maintain a healthy weight. Staples of the Mediterranean diet are rich in phytonutrients, natural chemicals that enhance health and wellness. It also features foods packed with fiber and essential vitamins and minerals that are a boon to skin health.

### What foods and drinks make up the Mediterranean Diet

Originating in Southern European countries Italy, Greece and Spain and also followed in Morocco and parts of South America, the Mediterranean diet revolves around the following foods and limited animal products:

Plentiful vegetables and fruits including spinach, lettuce, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, grapes, blueberries, peaches, strawberries, oranges

Whole grain breads, cereal and pasta

Beans

Fish

Monounsaturated fats including extra virgin olive oil, walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, avocados

Moderate amounts of lean poultry and meats

Moderate amounts of low fat yogurt and cheeses

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Plentiful water

Low-to-moderate amounts of wine and beer, preferable red wine

Olive oil and fresh herbs for cooking and seasoning food

Follow the Mediterranean diet to reach and maintain a healthy weight and put an end to yo-yo dieting and the rapid weight gain/loss that can lead to stretch mark development. The diet is recommended for all demographics, but especially pregnant mothers and growing teens, according to Dr. Maria Teresa Strumendo of Rome, an author and member of the Italian Society of Nutritional Sciences.

#### What experts have to say about the Mediterranean Diet and chronic disease prevention

On December 10, the Italian Cultural Institute in New York City organized a roundtable of Italian doctors to discuss the Mediterranean Diet's role as an icon of wellness. Experts in several sciences discussed the diet's positive impact on lowering risk for cancer, diabetes, fatty liver, heart disease and stroke.

Professor Pietro A. Migliaccio, President of the Italian Society of Nutritional Sciences and a prominent nutritionist frequently seen on Italian television, attributed the Mediterranean diet to a 9% reduction in heart disease, 6% reduction in cancer and 13% reduction in Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. Recommending a diet that offers 55-60% carbohydrates, 12-15% protein, 30% lipids and a maximum 10% of simple sugars, Dr. Migliaccio proposes eating five single course meals a day, like pasta e fagioli, a thick pasta and bean dish. He also praised the Mediterranean diet for its environmental role in decreasing greenhouse gases.

Francesco Santoni-Rugiu, Assistant Professor of Cardiology at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine and Einstein School of Medicine in New York City, discussed the Mediterranean Diet's beneficial effects on cardiovascular health. The Lyon Heart Study, conducted 20 years ago, is the first formal study on the diet. After following participants for an average 27 months, the study concluded that mortality from all causes was reduced by 70%. Dr. Santoni-Rugiu also highlighted that the Mediterranean Diet's key nutrients re-build cell membranes and reduce inflammation, which helps lower blood pressure, blood sugar and triglycerides.

Monica Fornier, M.D., a fellow at Weill Cornell Medical College and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, discussed data that shows how the Mediterranean Diet prevents cancer and related reoccurrences of the disease, especially breast and colon cancers. Dr. Fornier also stated that obese women at high risk of breast cancer can reduce risk with lower caloric intake.

Elisa Nascimbeni Ferran, M.D., a gastroenterologist at Lenox Hill Hospital, discussed the growing rate of fatty liver and metabolic syndrome, the later which increases risk for heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and stroke. She pointed to the Mediterranean Diet as a way to eradicate these illnesses by introducing healthier lifestyle choices, most importantly to obese adults and children.

#### Veggiecation, an educational program for kids and tweens, teaches health benefits of vegetables

Lisa Suriano, Founder and CEO of Veggiecation ([www.veggiecation.com](http://www.veggiecation.com)) is getting kids and adolescents to learn about the nutritional benefits of vegetables in fun interactive ways through her nutrition education program. A true advocate of the Mediterranean Diet, Lisa lived the lifestyle from a young age, having lived with Italian grandparents who kept a garden and cooked for the whole family.

Suriano swears by the skin health benefits of omega-3 rich walnuts, flaxseeds and cauliflower. In her workshops, tweens learn to keep skin blemish-free with such "beauty product veggies" as kale and carrots. She gets kids to eat their veggies by making produce-infused smoothies and hummus with fresh spinach.

As to special tips, Suriano recommends, "Faro is an amazing grain used in Mediterranean cooking. It's tasty and ideal for making a risotto. When reaching for breads and pastas, check food labels and make sure they're whole grain or whole wheat."

More than just a healthful way to eat, the Mediterranean lifestyle incorporates regular physical activity and a more relaxed approach to dining. Find an exercise you love, cook with seasonal whole foods and make time to eat with family and friends. Indulge in an occasional glass of red wine, bursting with mega-antioxidant resveratrol, which can improve circulation that adds to glowing skin.

#### Resources:

Attendance at roundtable on Mediterranean Diet on Dec 10 at Italian Cultural Center

Phone interview with Lisa Suriano of Veggiecation

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0004546/> Metabolic Syndrome

<http://www.mediterraneanbook.com/2011/03/08/mediterranean-diet-menu-maintain-healthy-skin/>

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/HEALTH/01/04/diet.good.for.skin/index.html>



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<http://www.drbaileyskincare.com/blog/cynthia-bailey-m-d-s-recommendations-for-the-alkaline-mediterranean-diet/>

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<http://www.livestrong.com/article/270719-mediterranean-diet-effects-on-weight/>

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