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Phytochemistry behind Mediterranean Diet: Health-Promoting Effects of Phytochemical Diversity

The Mediterranean basin has been for millennia a cross road of people and civilizations, where boats, carriages, people, merchandises, but also cultures and religions have converged. However, even if Mediterranean diet originated from the ancestors of inhabitants of this geographical area, the scientific study of this dietary style dates back to 1950s-60s, due to the Seven Countries Study by Ancel Keys and colleagues. Anyway, a unique Mediterranean diet does not exist, because of the differences in climatic and environmental conditions of Mediterranean regions as well as in traditions, religions and cultural traits of Mediterranean populations. The main dietary groups of Mediterranean diets includes whole grain cereals, fresh fruits and seasonal vegetables, legumes, fish and seafood, lean and white meat, dairy products, herbs and spices, nuts, olive oil and vinegar as main dressing, low to moderate red wine intake at main meals. Noteworthy, in 2013, the Mediterranean diet has been included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO). As recently emphasized, adherence to Mediterranean diet has been associated to a lower risk of chronic degenerative diseases, particularly cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative disorders and certain types of cancer. In particular, these health-promoting effects have, at least in part, been attributed to the chemical diversity of Mediterranean foods, which are rich in a plethora of bioactive phytochemicals (or nutraceuticals). In addition, health benefits of these functional foods may also be due the additive and/or synergistic effects of their components, even if data from preclinical and epidemiological studies need to be further substantiated by in human clinical trials.

Not least, other behaviours may contribute to improve the healthy potential of Mediterranean diet, such as enjoyment of meals in pleasant company and daily physical activity, thus delineating a more complex Mediterranean lifestyle.

Biography:

Professor of Plant Biology and Pathology at the Milan State University. He has been studying bioactive phytochemicals relevant for human nutrition and health, including indoleamines, polyphenols, carotenoids, sterols and essential oils, focusing on their functional role *in planta* as well as *in vitro/in vivo* and in human biological activities. Author of more than 100 publications (H-index: 29). Associate Editor-in-Chief of International Journal of Molecular Sciences (IF 3.2); Section Editor of Medicine (IF 5.7); Editor of Molecules (IF 2.4). Founding Member of the Italian Society of Environmental Medicine. Patents: Compositions Comprising Rutin Useful for the Treatment of Tumors Resistant to Chemotherapy (WO/2015/036875); Polyamidoamines for the Prevention and Treatment of Plant Diseases' (MI2013A002058).