**This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/stories/2023/05/healthy-living-mediterranean-diet.html**

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**The Med Way: K-State tests popular eating style during Walk Kansas**

Organizers say healthy lifestyle changes are key to successful aging

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – You don’t have to go to faraway countries – Greece, Cyprus or France, anyone? – to benefit from a popular style of eating.

In fact, Sharolyn Jackson says the Mediterranean diet is more a concept than a place.

“**It really is an eating style that can have any flavor profile**” said Jackson, the state leader of K-State Research and Extension’s popular Walk Kansas program, a team-based challenge that encourages people to walk, jog, run, bike, swim and move however they want to live more healthfully.

As part of this year’s Walk Kansas, which wraps up in late May, organizers offered a six-week pilot course on eating the Mediterranean way.

“The Med way is just healthy eating,” Jackson said. “But there are a lot of reasons why people feel kind of stuck when it comes to healthy eating. They think that it’s too hard, or too confusing. They get a lot of mixed messages from different places. And then they have this idea that it’s too expensive. They think it doesn’t taste good…or they don’t have enough time to prepare foods or plan what they’re going to eat. And maybe they have limited cooking skills.”

Instead, the Mediterranean eating style can be simple, and summarized in seven steps, according to Jackson:

- **Change your protein.** Choose white meat poultry, like chicken and turkey, and lean cuts of meat. Eat fish and seafood at least 2-3 times per week. Replace some of the meat in your diet with plant proteins. Eat red meat less often and choose leaner cuts. Eliminate processed meats or greatly limit them.
• **Swap your fats.** Instead of butter, use olive oil or canola oil for cooking foods. Don’t eliminate fats; just choose better ones.

• **Eat more vegetables.** Three cups of vegetables, per day, are recommended. Choose dark greens, and a variety of colors.

• **Eat more fruits.** Get at least two servings/cups of fruit per day. Choose a variety of colors and include berries often.

• **Snack on nuts and seeds.** Stick to about three ounces – about three small handfuls – so that you’re not over-doing it on the calories. Avoid nuts and seeds that are candied, honey roasted or high in salt.

• **Choose whole grains.** Choose whole grains like oatmeal, quinoa, brown rice, popcorn and whole grain bread and pasta. Look for the word “whole” as the first item on the ingredient list.

• **Rethink your sweets.** Limit intake to no more than three servings per week of high-sugar foods and drinks. Fruit is a good substitute for high-sugar desserts.

These recommendations, Jackson said, “don’t need to be abrupt changes. Move yourself slowly away (from your current eating habits) so that you feel like you’re not being deprived, but rather working toward making it a habit.”

Jackson said her recommendations come from curriculum titled, Med Instead of meds, developed by North Carolina state professor and registered dietitian nutritionist Carolyn Dunn. Additional resources are available online at https://medinsteadofmeds.com.

“Up to two-thirds of chronic diseases – like diabetes and heart disease – can be prevented by lifestyle changes, specifically diet and exercise,” Jackson said. “Research has shown the connection between lifestyle and chronic disease for some time, and it’s provided insight into some of the ways to move people in the right direction for making those lifestyle changes.”

To learn about future programs on the Mediterranean style of eating, interested persons may contact their local Kansas extension office. More information about Walk Kansas also is available at https://www.walkkansas.org.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this article
Walk Kansas, https://www.walkkansas.org

Med Instead of Meds, https://medinsteadofmeds.com

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, https://www.ksre.ks-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html
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