



Diet as part of a Healthy Lifestyle

Really, we should be looking at healthy eating as part of a healthy lifestyle rather than a specific diet. One of the most studied diets/lifestyles with good evidence for sustainability is that of the Mediterranean. It has been shown to have positive cardiovascular (heart) health effects as well as metabolic benefits that assist in long term weight control. Their diet is based on pulses (beans, peas lentils etc), vegetables, 'healthy' fats (olive and rapeseed oils), oily fish (mackerel, salmon, anchovies, sardines, herring etc), nuts and fruit, and reduced red meat.

Mediterranean people tend to eat together at the table instead of in front of the TV. There is a culture of enjoying food, the fresh local ingredients, preparation, and consumption. Ultra-processed foods (factory made with ingredients you would not recognise in your pantry) are uncommon. Most food is prepared in the home from raw, unprocessed ingredients. If there is consumption of alcohol this tends to be only modest and generally consists of a glass of red wine with the meal. This naturally tends towards eating slowly, giving the body time to feel full, and eating healthier foods.

Of course, the climate and lifestyle in the Mediterranean also favours exercise outdoors. While we may have to modify things for where we live and our specific circumstances there is much we can learn from this. Small adjustments over time, learning new recipes and taking more of an interest both in preparing and consuming our food in a healthy way can lead to a sustainable and enjoyable adjustment to our lifestyle which will help maintain a healthy weight as well as body and mind.

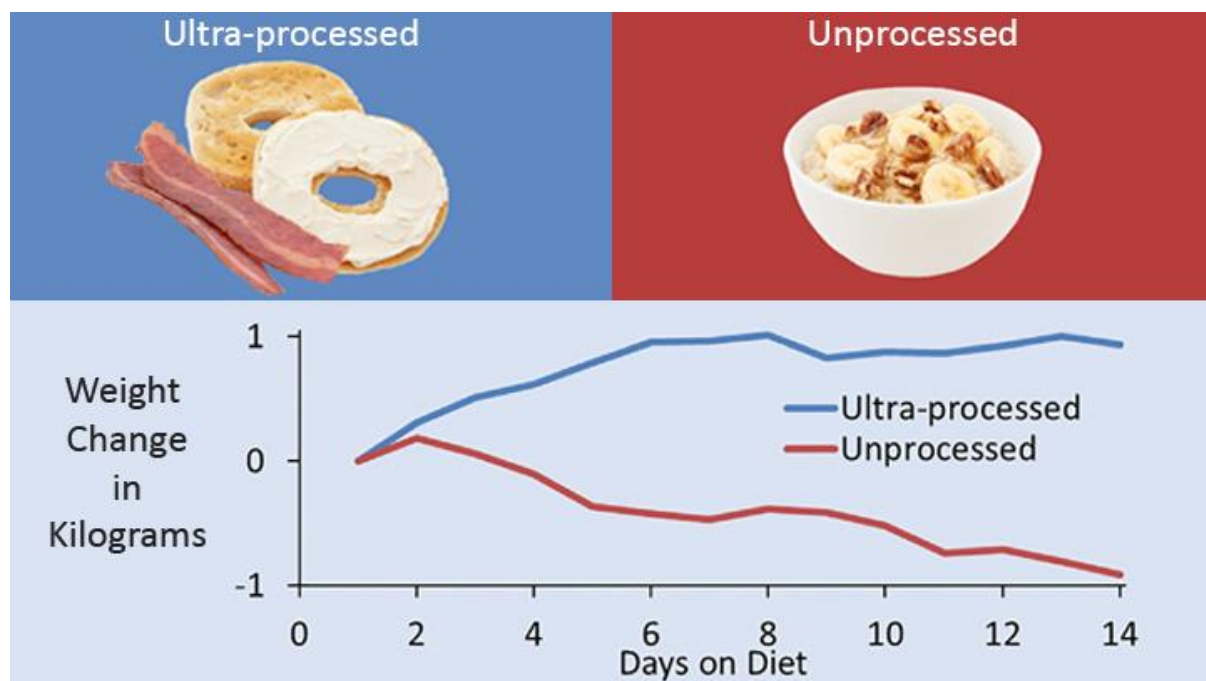
See here for more information;

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/nutrition/mediterranean-diet>

Ultra Processed Food

Ultra-processed food is, in short, generally found in plastic wrapping and contains at least one ingredient that you would not normally find in an average kitchen. It is likely that you currently get many of your calories from ultra-processed food. For example, most sandwiches use ultra-processed bread and sauces, almost all beverages, bars and snacks, ready meals etc are ultra-processed. Your body has not evolved to consume ultra-processed foods, they cause obesity, detrimental changes to your microbiome and are strongly associated with many inflammatory and cardiovascular diseases. Ultra-processed foods are addictive. An effective and sustainable way to lose weight is to reduce your consumption of ultra-processed foods.

Ultra-processed food causes obesity



Credit: Hall et al., Cell Metabolism, 2019

Microbiome

The gut microbiome consists of all the bacteria, fungus and viruses living in your gut. This sounds bad but in fact your microbiome can work with you to improve your health. The more diverse your microbiome the better your

health will tend to be and the more likely you are to maintain a healthy weight. Transplanting the microbiome from a healthy individual to an unhealthy one has been shown to improve health and weight.

A diverse microbiome improves health and maintains a lower weight.

To help maintain your microbiome you should make your diet as diverse as possible with a focus on increasing fibre and fermented foods. Things of particular benefit include high fibre foods like, artichoke, peas, beans and pulses, fermented foods and drinks like, Kombucha, kefir, yoghurts, home-made sourdough, and food and drinks high in polyphenols such as berries, nuts, cocoa, coffee, herbs/spices and red wine.

The watchword should be variety! Of course, care should be taken not to eat lots of sweet chocolate or drink lots of red wine because it contains some compounds which are beneficial, they also contain others which are harmful in excess.

Look after your microbiome and it will look after you.
