



Italy and Spain are world's healthiest countries, Mediterranean diet likely a key factor

Italy and Spain are the world's healthiest countries, according to the newly-released Bloomberg rankings, and researchers speculated that the Mediterranean diet, which has extra virgin olive oil at its core, is playing a key role.

The health benefits of the diet, which is characterized by a high consumption of vegetables, nuts, fish and extra virgin olive oil, has been regularly praised by scientists in published studies. For example, it has been linked to lower risks in strokes in women, obesity and depression.

A 2018 study involving those at high cardiovascular risk, led by the University of Navarra Medical School in north Spain, found that a Mediterranean diet supplemented by extra virgin olive oil or nuts had a lower incidence of major cardiovascular events than a reduced-fat diet.

Another recent report by the US Food and Drug Administration states that replacing fat and oil rich in saturated fats with oils containing high levels of oleic acid, a monounsaturated fat found in olive oil, can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. In particular, the new FDA regulation states that adding a tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil to the diet (ie 20 g) contributes to reducing the risk of coronary heart disease.

A diet enriched with oleic acid can also reduce intestinal inflammation and significantly lower tumor burden, according to one study carried out last year at the University of Bari in Puglia, southern Italy and was supported by the Italian association for cancer research, AIRC.

Oleic acid can be found naturally in many food sources, notably in extra virgin olive oil which boasts a range of 55-83% of this beneficial monosaturated fatty acid. Among all available olive oils, Italian extra virgin olive oils are said to contain the highest level of oleic acid, regardless of cultivar or genetic heritage.

Based on data from the WHO, World Bank and the UN, the 2019 Bloomberg Healthiest Country Index ranked 169 economies according to factors contributing to overall health, such as smoking rates and obesity, as well as high occurrences of elevated blood pressure and cholesterol.

China moved up three places in the rankings to 52nd, with the report noting that its life expectancy is likely to surpass the US by 2040, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

The international TAICHI project is spreading the word about the health benefits of using extra virgin olive oil for cooking to Mainland China and Taiwan.

Co-funded by the EU and promoted by the two main consortia of Italian olive growers, Italia Olivicola and UNAPOL, the TAICHI project offers consumers all the information they need to understand olive oil through its website, various social media platforms and OurOliveOil APP – available in the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).



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