

A Novel Mediterranean Diet Index from the Middle East and North Africa Region: Comparison with Europe

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Abstract : Purpose: To propose an index for assessing adherence to a Middle-Eastern version of the Mediterranean diet as represented by the traditional Lebanese Mediterranean diet (LMD), to evaluate the association between the LMD and selected European Mediterranean diets (EMD); to examine socio-demographic and lifestyle correlates of adherence to Mediterranean diet (MD) among Lebanese adults. Methods: Using nationally representative dietary intake data of Lebanese adults, an index to measure adherence to the LMD was derived. The choice of food groups used for calculating the LMD score was based on results of previous factor analyses conducted on the same dataset. These food groups included fruits, vegetables, legumes, olive oil, burghol, dairy products, starchy vegetables, dried fruits, and eggs. Using Pearson's correlation and scores tertiles distributions agreement, the derived LMD index was compared to previously published EMD indexes from Greece, Spain, Italy, France, and EPIC. Results: Fruits, vegetables and olive oil were common denominators to all MD scores. Food groups, specific to the LMD, included burghol and dried fruits. The LMD score significantly correlated with the EMD scores, while being closest to the Italian ($r=0.57$) and farthest from the French ($r=0.21$). Percent agreement between scores' tertile distributions and Kappa statistics confirmed these findings. Multivariate linear regression showed that older age, higher educational, female gender, and healthy lifestyle characteristics were associated with increased adherence to all MD studied. Conclusion: A novel LMD index was proposed to characterize Mediterranean diet in Lebanon, complementing international efforts to characterize the MD and its association with disease risk.

Keywords : mediterranean diet, adherence, Middle-East, Lebanon, Europe

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