

ABSTRACT

## ”New German Diet”?

### The concept of a locally adapted Mediterranean diet for weight loss

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**An energy-restricted Mediterranean diet is effective for weight loss. It also has favourable metabolic effects and can lower the risk for chronic diseases and cardiovascular mortality. But because a traditional Mediterranean diet is significantly different from the eating habits common in Germany, the recipes have been adapted to local habits whilst maintaining the key nutrition factors (“New German Diet”?). Instead of olive oil, for example, usually rapeseed/canola oil was used – with or without butter flavour – as well as walnut oil and/or walnuts. The average daily calorie content of the diet was 1,300 calories. In addition to three main meals, two mostly sweet snacks in defined portions of 170 calories each were included – to allow for flexible cognitive control. A randomized waiting-list controlled study showed that this concept of a locally adapted Mediterranean diet is successful.**

#### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In a randomized trial with 212 volunteers with a Body Mass Index of 25 to 35 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, the mean weight loss in the intervention group was 5.2 kg over twelve weeks. One year after the diet started, the weight loss achieved by the participants who completed the follow-up was still 4.2 kg. In parallel, the cardiovascular risk profile showed improvements comparable to those of a traditional Mediterranean diet. Regarding the fact that the subjects were only given printed handouts but no personal counselling was provided, this amount of weight loss shows practicability and effectiveness of the concept under free living conditions in Germany.

#### TWO SWEET SNACKS PLANNED EACH DAY

The snacks were predominantly small treats such as granola bars, cake, chocolate bars and even caramelized walnuts in defined portions. They provided an average of 170 calories and 12 grams of sugar per snack. The total content of sucrose in the diet accounted for 12.1 percent of the calories. Sugar in this quantity did not have any adverse effects on weight management or on the improvement of associated risk factors. A certain proportion of sugar may contribute to a higher compliance/adherence to the diet; this can be crucial for medium-term and long-term success.

#### HEALTH AS A PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The study with the locally adapted Mediterranean diet (“New German Diet”?) was primarily conducted to evaluate the diet’s suitability for weight loss in people with overweight or grade I obesity. The majority of all the previous studies dealing both with the traditional Mediterranean diet and with locally adapted variants such as the “New Nordic Diet” had not been conducted with the aim of weight loss/management, however. The main outcomes were usually cardiovascular risk factors and/or the incidence of related diseases. The locally adapted Mediterranean diet in this study contained just 1,300 calories per day but could also be used without caloric limitation. As such the concept could be an option worth considering as a dietary concept for improving general cardiovascular health. At present, however, there are no Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) with cardiovascular health as primary outcome.

#### NOTE REGARDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The study received financial support from the company Taste of Sweden and the California Walnut Commission. Neither company had any influence on the study design, the evaluation and the publication of the study<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Austel A., Ranke C., Wagner N., Gorge J., Ellrott T. (2015): Weight loss with a modified Mediterranean type diet using fat modification – a randomized controlled trial. Eur J Clin Nutr 69 (8): 878–884