8 Diets Linked to Slower Aging, and What Sets Each Apart

5 MIN READ

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BY HEATHER HURLOCK

There is no single right diet for longevity. A guide to how eight healthy diets slow aging according to three biological aging clocks.

If youâ??ve ever stood in your kitchen wondering whether youâ??re supposed to be eating Mediterranean, DASH, MIND, or Paleo, a team in Germany has news that should let you exhale and drop your shoulders a bit.

Researchers at the German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE) **looked at the eating habits of 6,470 adults**, ages 30 to 95, and graded each personâ??s diet 10 different ways. Eight of the scores measure how closely someone follows a familiar healthy pattern: Mediterranean, DASH, MIND, Nordic, the Alternate Healthy Eating Index, the EAT-Lancet planetary health diet, and two plant-based versions. The last two measure the reverse: one flags a plant-based diet built on refined grains and sweets, and the other rates how inflammatory a diet is.

Then they estimated each personâ??s biological age from a blood sample, using three epigenetic clocks. These tools read chemical tags on DNA, called methylation, to estimate how fast your body is aging. The higher people scored on any of the eight healthy patterns, the more slowly they tended to be aging. The higher they scored on the two unhealthy ones, the faster they tended to be aging.

â??Our study suggests that healthy eating goes hand in hand with slower biological aging,â?• says Monique Breteler, who directs Population Health Sciences at DZNE and leads the Rhineland Study.

To check the results werenâ??t a fluke, the researchers ran the analysis again in a separate German study of 1,034 people. The pattern held. And hereâ??s the number that should make you feel better about your own plate. Of the 6,470 people in the

study, just 18 landed in the top quarter on every score.

In the words of lead author Juliana Tavares, â??hardly anyone counts as a healthy eater by every standard at once.â?•

So not only does this research confirm that healthy eating is tied to the rate of aging, it also confirms that many of us can make some simple diet swaps that can have a serious affect on our healthspan.

The 8 Healthy Diets and How They Affect Our DNA and Aging

The researchers used three clocks to measure two different things.

- **Pace of aging:** One clock, **DunedinPACE**, estimates how fast youâ??re aging right now.
- **How much aging:** The other two, **GrimAge** and **PhenoAge**, estimate how much biological aging has built up so far.

Every healthy diet below was linked to a slower aging pace. Only two were also clearly linked to lower biological age.

1. DASH Diet

What is it? Short for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, DASH is built around plant foods, with a firm limit on sodium.

How does it affect aging? It was one of only two diets linked to slower aging on all three clocks.

What is special about how it affects your health? Its DNA changes were tied to heart valve development, a neat match for a diet designed for the heart. The American

Heart Associationâ??s 2026 guidelines also **single it out** as one of the best-supported eating patterns for heart health.

2. Nordic Diet

What is it? The Nordic diet is built on traditional Scandinavian staples, including fish, cabbage, rye bread, oatmeal, apples and pears, and root vegetables.

How does it affect aging? It joined DASH as the only other diet linked to slower aging on all three clocks.

What is special about how it affects your health? Research has linked it to a **23% lower risk of early death**. In this study, the Nordic diet was ied to its own set of chemical tags on DNA, in genes involved in cell signaling, metabolism, and the growth of new nerve cells.

3. MIND Diet

What is it? A hybrid of Mediterranean and DASH, the **MIND diet** is built around foods linked to brain protection, such as berries and leafy greens.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of biological aging.

What is special about how it affects your health? Its DNA changes were tied to cognition, learning, and memory. In the **study that introduced the diet**, the people who followed it most closely had slower cognitive decline, a gap equal to being 7.5 years younger.

4. Mediterranean Diet

What is it? The Mediterranean diet centers on vegetables, fruit, beans, whole grains, olive oil, and fish, with little red meat.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of aging. On the two clocks

that measure biological age, people with higher Mediterranean scores also looked younger, but that link was too weak to be sure it wasnâ??t a coincidence.

What is special about how it affects your health? A *Nature Medicine* study that tracked more than 5,700 people for three decades **tied it to lower dementia risk**, with the strongest effect in people who carry APOE4, the main genetic risk factor for Alzheimerâ??s

5. Alternate Healthy Eating Index Diet

What is it? This one is less a cuisine than a scorecard. **Harvard researchers built it** from the foods and nutrients that best predict chronic disease risk.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of aging. When the researchers pooled the main study with the second, smaller one, for about 7,500 people in all, it was also linked to lower biological age.

What is special about how it affects your health? It was tied to more chemical tags on DNA than any other diet, at 54 sites, including genes involved in metabolism. In earlier research, the dietâ??s strongest links were to lower risk of heart disease and diabetes.

6. Plant-Based Diet

What is it? The plant-based index is a score that goes up with **every plant food you eat** and down with every animal food.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of aging.

What is special about how it affects your health? Several of its chemical tags on DNA sat in a gene involved in metabolism. In the **research that created the score**, which followed about 200,000 U.S. health professionals, higher scores went with a modestly lower risk of coronary heart disease.Â

7. Healthy Plant-Based Diet

What is it? This is the pickier version of the plant-based score. It rewards whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, tea, and coffee, and marks down refined grains, sweets, sugary drinks, and fries.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of aging.

What is special about how it affects your health? The highest scorers on this version had about a 25% lower risk of coronary heart disease than the lowest scorers, a much stronger link than for plant-based eating overall.

8. EAT-Lancet Diet

What is it? Known as the â??planetary health diet,â?• EAT-Lancet was designed for human health and environmental sustainability together.

How does it affect aging? It was linked to a slower pace of aging but not to lower biological age, which made it the weakest of the eight.

What is special about how it affects your health? It is the only pattern here built around the planet as well as the person. **The authors suggest** that may explain its weaker showing: It limits how much of even healthy foods counts, and it treats some nutrient-rich foods as optional.

Two scores measured unhealthy eating

The **unhealthy plant-based index** flags a diet that is technically plant-based but built on refined grains, sweets, sugary drinks, and fries. The Dietary Inflammatory Index rates how inflammatory a personâ??s overall diet is. Higher scores on both were linked to a faster pace of aging.

Before you rearrange your pantry

- **This is a snapshot.** Nobody was assigned a diet, so it shows links, not cause and effect.
- **The effects are small.** Breteler put it plainly: â??The effects are not massive, but they are measurable and relevant for prevention.â?•
- **Diets were self-reported,** and both study groups were mostly Germans of European ancestry.
- **One open puzzle:** The link showed up most clearly in current smokers. Tavares offers a guess, that smokers may simply have more to gain from eating well, but the biology is unexplained.

WHAT TO DO WITH IT

1. **Stop shopping for the perfect diet.** Pick the pattern closest to how you already like to eat, and go a little deeper.
2. **Lean on the common ground.** These patterns share more vegetables, fruit, and whole grains, and less red and processed meat and sugar.
3. **Use your own concerns as a tiebreaker.** The authors suggest diet-specific pathways could one day guide personal advice. For now, DASH if youâ??re thinking about your heart and MIND if youâ??re thinking about your brain is a reasonable lean.
4. **Let one meal be one meal.** This study measured habits over the past year, not a single dinner.

Pass the Brussels sprouts. Or the rye bread. Your DNA isnâ??t keeping score by cuisine.

Which Diet Are You Eating? Take the Quiz

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WRITTEN BY:



Heather Hurlock