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Editorial

The Mediterranean-Style Diet: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

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During the Greek Hellenistic Period, the concept of a healthy diet was associated with quality of life and well-being. The ancient Greeks recognized the importance of dietetics within the overall framework of health promotion and disease prevention to such an extent that various diseases were attributed to an 'unhealthy' diet and that dietary interventions were a means of treatment. In Homer's classic *The Iliad*, Podalirius, one of the two physicians described in the epic, had a special interest in dietetics. Noted works by Hippocrates, Herodotus, Galen, and Plato cited nutritional concepts and its role in treating and preventing various diseases [1-3].

The ancient Mediterranean foods have been associated with the ancient Greeks and biblical peoples of the Near East. During this period, the Mediterranean culture integrated a diversity of peoples, cultures, and civilizations as witnessed by the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, and the Ottomans [4]. The origins of the Mediterranean-style diet (MD) encompassed the history of the Mediterranean civilizations and the Near East. Trading, merchandise, philosophies, and religions all have converged around the Mediterranean basin. The immemorial olive trees, vineyards, and wheat grains have been in this area for as long as history has been inscribed. Citrus fruits originating from the

Far East were brought to the Mediterranean region by Arab traders. Rice, beans, tomatoes, eggplants, and selected nuts were also imported and became integral components of the MD [4-6].

Although different regions of the Mediterranean basin consist of their own unique foods and cuisines, these variants represent a single entity that share a multitude of dietary similarities and common denominators [5,7,8]. Documented proponents of the MD began as early as the 17th century. In 1614, Italian travel writer and refugee, Giacomo Castelvetro, voiced his persuasions to the British population in his book titled *A Brief Account of the Fruit, Herbs & Vegetables of Italy* to consume a variety of fruits and vegetables and minimize what he saw as an over indulgence of sweets and meats in Britain. Mid-20th century English cookery writer, Elizabeth David, in her book titled *Mediterranean Food* carried on Castelvetro's message centuries later [8,9].

Today, the positive and synergistic effects of Mediterranean-style dietary patterns composed of both plant-based dietary fiber and monounsaturated fatty acids, primarily from olive oil, have been suggested in previous evidence [10-12]. Additionally, the MD has been previously proposed as an environmentally-

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friendly diet model defined by its environmental sustainability [13-15]. A closer look at the history of the Mediterranean diet with special relevance towards

addressing global public health nutrition priorities and complexities could expand our understanding of healthy eating to contemporary ways of thinking.

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