



“To Save the Planet, Have A Tiramisu”
Contribution of the Mediterranean Food Culture to
Workplace Well-Being”

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OVERVIEW

1. The historical origins of the Mediterranean diet in relation to the ideas of food philosophy and the evolution of the concept of food over time
2. The key characteristics of the Mediterranean diet
3. Examples of specific food-related choices across organizations and their impact on the workplace well-being
4. Conclusions

1.

The historical origins of the Mediterranean diet in relation to the ideas of food philosophy and the evolution of the concept of food over time

- The roots of the Mediterranean diet can be found in antiquity
- Since its origins the Mediterranean diet was based on the food available in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean basin considered as “***the cradle of civilization***” (Radd-Vagenas *et al.*, 2017)
- The use of such ingredients varied due to the eating habits of the various civilizations present in the area, the historical period, the agricultural production and the seasonality of the food.

- Plato – the ancient Greek philosopher – in his work was already stating how food is a primary need both for our soul and our body but only if consumed in **moderation**
- He also explained how a healthy diet consists mainly of plant-based food and only **moderate** quantities of meat to avoid illnesses
- During the Roman times indications suggested the consumption of bread, oil and even wine but only with **moderate** amounts of meat
- Hence **the key elements of Mediterranean diets** can be summarized as: **choice of vegetable ingredients, variety and moderation** without forgetting **enjoyment**

- In this moment of multicultural experiences, food helps us to show that we exist, that we have an identity and that **through food we can connect.**
- Throughout history, food in general and, more specifically in the Mediterranean diet, has been a catalyst for human aggregation and friendship.
- Today food in organizations should not only be considered as “food” but rather as a language that speaks for:

Healthy Living, Inclusion and Common Sense of purpose

2. *The key characteristics of the Mediterranean diet*

- The Mediterranean diet can be rather considered a healthy **lifestyle** promoting:

Main consumption of plant-based foods as well as pasta and other cereals (not refined whole grains)

Regular use of aromatic herbs to reduce salt and to add flavour

Use of extra virgin olive oil as the main source of monounsaturated fats

Moderate intake of wine with meals

Moderate intake of meat (ideally white), fish and eggs

Reduced consumption of sweets and products rich in added sugars.

Daily consumption of milk and dairy products, mostly low-fat

Water to maintain an healthy level of hydration

- The Mediterranean diet guarantees our organism:

Moderate amounts of protein, mainly from vegetable sources

Carbohydrates with a low index and glycemic load, with almost no simple sugars

High monounsaturated / saturated fatty acid ratio

Abundance of calcium, magnesium and potassium with a low amounts of sodium.

High intake of antioxidants, including vitamin C and vitamin E as well as natural polyphenols

3. *Examples of specific food-related choices across organizations and their impact on the workplace well-being*

- The Mediterranean diet has been recognized by Unesco as part of Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage (Moro E,2016) as it protects not only our physical but also our mental health.
- The principles of Mediterranean diet can also be applied in countries where there are different climatic conditions and no access to the ingredients of the Mediterranean basin as proved by Chef René Rédzepi and restaurateur, Claus Meyer in the New Nordic Diet (Mithril C *et al.*,2012).
- Pop up Noma restaurants also showed how this approach can also be applied to traditional ingredients and dishes in places as far as Mexico Australia and Japan using the following principles for the selection of food:

“Easy to love, easy to get hold of, easy to make and easy to afford.”

In the workplace setting, successful initiatives include:

- Focus on eating the “rainbow” – consuming a wide variety of plants
- Include underutilized local plant
- Mix and match menus to allow diners to add or subtract dishes or sauces in order to reduce their fat intake and a similar approach can also be followed in dressing free salad bars
- Offering bouillon-based vegetable rich soups.
- Introduce the “Three Pleasures: Dark 70% chocolate, Fruits and Nuts - as the principal ingredients for health promoting dessert - as identified by Walter Willet at Harvard Medical Schools and Culinary Institute of America.

4.

Conclusions

- The concept of Mediterranean diet finds its origin in antiquity and till these days with its food offering remains an excellent way of supporting healthy nutrition.
- In organizations, managers need to support the transformation processes toward healthy eating because better well-being practices at work will not only foster higher productivity but will also further strengthen the perception of the company in the eyes of the employees.
- Finally, we – individuals and employees together with Managers need to keep educating ourselves about the Science of Nutrition – as education empower people to make better-informed choices.

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