

CANCERS, THE OLIVE OIL BLOCKS THEM AND 'HELPS' MEDICINES. THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET WINS AGAIN

by Carmelo Vazzana, vice president of Unasco

The olive oil stops cancer-growth and empowers the effect of medicines. This is what Massimo Lopez sustained-director of the department of oncology of the Institute of Cancers in Rome and member of the Scientific Association of the Human Health Foundation- (a foundation that fights against cancer born in 2006), he is also the author of the book 'Cancer: know it to fight it'. Lopez underlines how a correct diet can help to avoid 25% of cancers and over all the use of the olive oil is an "important adjuvant of some processes that can stop cancer, and help prevention". "As for the most important causes of cancer, tobacco and wrong diet-the expert emphasizes- are respectively responsible of 70% of today's cancers". But diet is certainly considered fundamental for prevention: "the use of olive oil, thanks to the oleic acid and the lutein -he puts in evidence- is very important even for the cellular membrane. The olive oil, with fish and cooked or uncooked vegetables, are the best weapons against cancer. The use of excessive fats, on the contrary, should be fought because – Lopez sustains –they cause an increase in the cases of colon-cancer, breast – cancer and prostate cancer. Finally, the expert underlines – the data show how the number of cancer cases among men and women is decreasing with the passing of time; but nowadays there are still 1.700.000 victims of cancer all over the world. About 11 million people get a cancer every year. Indeed there are about 25 million people living with a cancer, among which 800.000 here in Italy. This problem is going to increase, even if the survival bend has been progressively increasing since the 60's. Three kinds of cancer are thought to be caused by food, or better, by bad food habits. The experts have no doubts, and for this reason they advise a correct and healthy diet to prevent this bad disease. The so-called healthy diet can be mostly identified with the Mediterranean diet; but even the time has a role: the experts say in fact that it is important to eat the right food at the right moment. The specialists reckon that the secret is in nature- alchemy, that provides precious substances, able to prevent from cancer. The advice are well known: a little fatty food and sausages, few animal fats and "red" meat, a lot of fruit, vegetable, cereals and fish. But there is a further

advice to be taken into consideration: be careful in matching different kinds of food! The scientific director of Regina Elena Institute in Rome- Paola Muti- underlines that in the fight against cancer the key- word is “synergy” among the different components in food. This means that we must learn to eat in a varied way, but even that the benefits of every single food element are still unknown. “On this point a recent Italian study published in “ the British Journal of nutrition” – Paola Muti adds –“ has for example put in evidence that the benefits of salad are reinforced by the antioxidant action of the olive oil and vinegar, but they can be further increased if you add in your salad fresh marjoram or some other aromatic herbs. Indeed what we eat is extremely important but even when we eat. This is a “golden rule” emphasize the experts: the respect of the natural rhythms and the chrono-biology: in the morning we need more sugar, at lunch low fat food and carbohydrates are advisable, while the latter should be avoided at dinner. Carbohydrates are usually transformed into fats and they are useless in the evening, turning into a risking factor pro-cancer. In other words, if we eat fats in the evening we self-synthesize useless and abundant fats, that turn to be dangerous. Thus we must be careful about food and natural rhythms. This way we get stronger against cancer. The Mediterranean diet seems to have all the characteristics necessary to take cholesterol under control: regular use of fruit and vegetables, olive oil (rich in monounsaturated fatty acids) as main dressing; on the other hand a limited consumption of products derived from milk, of the so-called ‘red meat’, eggs and wine. As for the food particularly rich in cholesterol, it is not probably to be avoided or completely banned (as for example eggs) because it supplies other important nourishing elements beyond cholesterol; the question is that the assumption of this food must be controlled and balanced so that the daily support of cholesterol is not more than 300 mg. Fibres are supposed to reduce cholesterol (especially those contained in cereals and pulses) if a daily quantity of about 25-30 grams is assumed. Regular physical activity is of course fundamental: it is supposed to be effective when 1500 kilocalories are reached weekly, corresponding to about 24 km-fast-walk. The experts advice the Mediterranean diet unless the last directions, coming from the zone-diet, are taken into consideration. This theme was discussed in Rome, during the last meeting Science in Nutrition, organized

by the foundation Paolo Sorbini, where the best-known experts in the field were present.

The classical Mediterranean diet is very good- the nutritionist from Milan University Enrico Arcelli confirms- the healthiest food remain vegetable, fruit and olive oil even for the zone-diet. This two-day-meeting on food-science was attended by world-wide famous experts and researchers: Mit Barry Sears, president of the Inflammation research foundation, the twins Bradley and Craig Willcox, anthropologists and gerontologists, researchers and professors from Okinawa Centenarian Study.

The comparison among diets was taken into consideration and the possibility to match the zone diet to the Mediterranean diet was discussed: the zone diet is based on the effects the hormones have on food.

There was a wide discussion but the common opinion was that our diet is adequate if we do not exaggerate with food containing a high glycaemia index, that is, the food which is rapidly assimilated by our body, as the cereals contained in the pasta.

This analysis was confirmed with the nomination, in Barcelona, of the Mediterranean diet as cultural, immaterial heritage of Unesco. The joint nomination was presented by Spain, Italy, Greece and Morocco, through some working groups in charge to present the (cultural, historical productive and social) motivations leading to this nomination. This dossier will be then analysed by Unesco, giving its opinion within winter 2009.

The ceremony was attended by Paolo De Castro, ministry for agricultural politics. There is a certain datum: the main agricultural productions characterizing the Mediterranean diet constitute the 40% of the whole European production achieving the value of € 118 milliard. The influence increases in the countries of the Mediterranean area.

As for Italy half the agricultural production is constituted by cereals, vegetables, fruit, olive oil and fish,- not to forget wine- the ministry emphasized- whose production overcomes €9 milliard, only in Italy-. For this reason, the defence of the Mediterranean products 'is surely a strategic and basic element for the agro food politics in Italy and in all the other countries'.

De Castro attended Alimentaria 2008 in Barcellona together with the Spanish ministry of Agriculture, Elena Spinosa, where he underlined that the Mediterranean diet is a treasure to be kept and spread, because of its healthy benefits that have characterized the common cultural identity of the Mediterranean countries over the centuries.

The Mediterranean diet was subject to all kinds

of researches and studies around the world. The latest one, that was published one year ago, was included in the project "Olive Oil European Style", promoted by the "Institute for the Development of Olive Oil" of Rome and financed by the Italian government and by the European Union.

Its benefits and defects were scientifically proved, according to a study and a comparison of diets adopted by seven nations of different cultures and customs.

The results showed that the best diet was from the village of Nicotera, in the province of Vibo Valentia (Calabria), 3km from Limbadi, where our company and our agricultural lands are.

The Nicotera diet is the synonym of a healthy diet that consists of simple, non elaborate dishes, healthy ingredients without preservatives, a diet in which extra-virgin olive oil is a key protagonist, just like pasta, fish or vegetables. It should be pointed out that the elderly people in this village have lower incidence of mortality caused by cardiovascular diseases; in short, it is the diet for a long life.

Furthermore, The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a healthy diet that is very similar to a typical Mediterranean diet, that our grandfathers used to practice during the 50s.

The health benefits are present not only in the Mediterranean Diet but also in the olive oil. Even the "Food and Drug Administration", that is, the institution that regulates drugs in the USA, invited the American population to consume 21 grams of olive oil a day.

If the Mediterranean diet is followed or complemented by some physical activities, the benefits will include a reduction in cardiovascular diseases such as ictus, ischemia and colon cancers. We have already known the benefits of the Mediterranean Diet, but unfortunately, we also notice in Italy nowadays, that only 15% of the population eat a healthy and balanced diet, and follow the Mediterranean diet.

This situation is worse among young people; we find more and more consumption of industrial food, rich in preservatives and colourings.

Long life with the Mediterranean diet! In fact according to a survey published in the British Medical Journal, made among 75.000 healthy over sixty-year-old women and men coming from nine European countries, it was shown that those who follow this diet usually enjoy a longer life. The research was coordinated by Antonia Trichopoulos belonging to the Health and Epidemiology department of Athens University. According to these researchers Spain and Greece are the countries that get the best results by this

diet, characterized by a high use of fruit, vegetables and cereals, limited consumption of milk and meat, a good use of fish, unsaturated fats like those contained in the olive oil, a little alcohol and above all wine. The researchers analysed a great deal of data as regards lifestyle, diseases, hereditary factors and type of diet followed by the sample-people taken into consideration. The epidemiologists established a scale of value to check the benefits of the Mediterranean diet; they found out that the higher the score on the scale the lower the mortality rate recorded. The link between the Mediterranean diet and the longevity shows that every two-point-increase on the value scale corresponds to a 8% decrease of the mortality rate. Every three-or-four-point-increase of people following this diet comes out to cause a decrease in the mortality rate of 11% and 14%, respectively. So for example a sixty-year-old man following the Mediterranean diet faithfully (6 - 9 points on the scale of adhesion) will probably live on average one year more than a man of the same age not following this diet but with similar characteristics. According to the Greek experts the association diet-longevity is to be explained by the great deal of anti-oxidants supplied by our diet; these are able to retard the damages in our cells, caused by free radicals. Finally the faithfulness to the traditional tastes of our diet is rewarded by greater life- expectations, that is why it is important that old people follow this diet; even considering their rapid increase in number all over Europe.