

## Abstract

Although the French consume high fat, calorically dense foods, they are on the whole slimmer and healthier than their American counterparts. By consuming a French-style diet, anyone can enjoy the creamy cheeses, rich chocolates, and savory wines of French cuisine while minimizing their risk of coronary heart disease and obesity. To learn more about this "French paradox", I consulted books, news articles, and peer-reviewed journals to compare French and American dietary trends and to determine why nutrition research has concluded that the Mediterranean diet is so healthy. While nutrition experts have not pinpointed a single factor that makes the French diet superior, numerous independent studies suggest that various elements of the French diet, including consumption of some red wine and a variety of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables is critical to disease prevention. In addition, French psychological and sociological attitudes about food and mealtime, such as small portions and long meals, influence consumption patterns and promote healthier eating habits.

## Introduction

Consuming a French style diet is not about counting calories or deprivation. Instead of eating bland pre-packaged meals, one can enjoy the richness of French cuisine (including delicious chocolate and savory wines) while enjoying numerous health benefits. The basic premise of the French Diet rests on abandoning preservative-laden American foods and eating a French, whole foods diet. American obesity is at 30% and rising, but obesity in France hovers at a mere 11% (1). While American disease and obesity continues to skyrocket, the French remain healthy and trim despite the frequent consumption of rich, calorically dense meals. On the whole, the French also enjoy a lower prevalence of disease and longer, healthier lives (2).

## Method

Method: To gain a broad understanding of the French diet, I consulted a wide variety of sources ranging from journal articles to books and newspaper and magazine articles.

## Results

### Part 1: French Style vs. American Style Macaroni and Cheese

French Style Macaroni and Cheese (3)	American Style Macaroni and Cheese (4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•2 cups elbow macaroni</li> <li>•1 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese</li> <li>•2 tablespoons unsalted butter</li> <li>•2 tablespoons all-purpose flower</li> <li>•½ cup half and half</li> <li>•1 bay leaf</li> <li>•Pinch of salt</li> <li>•Splash of extra-virgin olive oil</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Enriched Macaroni Product (Wheat Flour, Niacin, Ferrous Sulfate [Iron], Thiamin Mononitrate [Vitamin B1], Riboflavin [Vitamin B2], Folic Acid)</li> <li>•Cheese Sauce Mix (Whey, Milkfat, Milk Protien Concentrate, Sodium Tripoly Phosphate, Contains Less Than 2% Citric Acid, Sodium Phosphate, Lactic Acid, Milk, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Enzymes, Cheese Culture)</li> <li>•3 tablespoons butter</li> <li>•3 tablespoons 2% milk</li></ul>

#### Part 2: Dietary Components of the French Paradox

### Wine Consumption

- “Ethanol, particularly wine ethanol, is inversely related to coronary heart disease” (5)
- “Biologically active flavanoid from red grapes may work in three ways to lower the risk of heart disease: by reducing production of harmful oxidized LDL cholesterol, boosting beneficial HDL cholesterol, and cutting blood platelet aggregation” (6)
- “The high mean level of alcohol consumption in France might be one of the factors responsible for this French peculiarity” (7)
- “Those who drink moderately retain higher levels of high-density lipoproteins, the so-called good cholesterol, and face about half the risk of heart attack” (8)
- “Acetaldehyde from alcohol might stop the formation of AGEs” (AGEs are products of free radical reactions that cause wrinkles, cardiovascular (CHD) and other damage) (9)
- Inhibition of platelet reactivity by wine (alcohol) may be one explanation for protection from CHD in France” (10)

# Why The French Diet Works

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#### Part 2: Dietary Components of the French Paradox

### Dietary Diversity

- “In many ways, the French do eat more healthful diets than Americans. Most critically, they eat fewer calories and a more varied overall diet” (11)
- “Eating a healthy diet, specifically fruits and vegetables, provides the body with the antioxidants needed to protect and repair itself” (6)
- “Fruit and vegetable consumption is inversely related to coronary heart disease mortality” (12)
- “fruit and vegetables, however, are rich sources of folate [...] this should explain the French paradox...” (12)
- “Although the French diet failed to meet some of the USDA dietary guidelines, it was diverse and varied as judged by other standards. In particular, and under the present definition of variety, the most varied diets were also highest in energy and fat.” (13)

### Snack Less

- “The French snack must less than Americans, and do almost all of their eating at extended lunches and dinners” (11)

### Part 3: Psychological and Sociological Components of the French Paradox

### Smaller Portions

- “French portion sizes are notably smaller than American portions. This is particularly striking when comparing the size of ice cream cones—the French serve golf ball-sized spheres while Americans get tennis ball-sized mounds” (11)
- “A major reason for the fact that the French are leaner than Americans: Their portion sizes are smaller” (11)
- “Our study shows that the environment also plays an important role and that people may be satisfied even if served less than they would normally eat” (15)

### Longer Meals

- “one can make less go a longer way, by both eating more slowly and paying more attention to the food one is eating” (14)

### Costs of Eating

- “higher-quality diets cost more not only because they have a low energy density but because they are nutrient rich” (16)

### Attitudes on Food

- “We find that in general, food brings to mind, in the French, the experience of eating, while for Americans, it is more likely to conjure thoughts of calories, nutrients, or the effects of food on the body” (11)

## Results

Although the French are healthier than Americans, no single aspect of the has yet been found to account for their health and weight. However, making cor and drawing conclusions from the differences between French and American ea useful exercise. While in America, simple, almost effortless meals like Kraft mac popular with both children and adults, in France this is not the case (17).The Fr into preparing their meals and enjoy the quality of their food to a much greater c Americans (17). Table One compares Kraft Macaroni and Cheese with a traditio Macaroni recipe. Because the French often cook with household ingredients- re real flour, real butter, they are not exposed to ingredients such as Tripolyphosph and Yellow 6, Ingredients are shown in Part 1 (17).

The French enjoy a variety of whole foods, which the evidence in Part 2 de highly beneficial to one’s health (17). By consuming a broad spectrum of foods, fruits and vegetables, the French meet all their nutritional needs without consum of any particular food (11). Individual foods that are consumed on a regular bas red wine, can be very healthy. Part 2 shows that the 1-2 glasses of red wine pe been proven to fight a variety of diseases, especially coronary heart disease (1

While the foods we eat play a role in our overall health, it would be foolish to ignore the importance of the psychological and sociological factors of consumption. The e presented in Part 3 explains that in France, everything from restaurant portions store items are smaller that in America (11). Instead of gorging and becoming u gigantic portions, evidence shows that the French are far more likely to eat slow food, and be satisfied (15). Because higher quality foods cost more money, eat being satisfied is economical, delicious, and healthy (16). Finally, one of the mo psychological factors is how the French view food. While Americans think of cal weight loss, the French think of delicious foods and the pleasures of eating (11). the French do not worry as much about what or how much they eat, they still en consuming more calorically dense foods while remaining trim (11). Ultimately, th between French and American eating habits may reflect deeper cultural tensor two societies. Some people think on one hand there is a culture of pleasure thro moderation, on the other, a culture of empty, unsatisfying excess.

## Conclusion

Instead of slaving away counting calories and depr delicious foods, a French diet allows a person to have their cake and eat it too diverse diet full of whole foods and devoid of preservatives, the French diet can needs while allowing occasional indulgence in wine and chocolate. Though Fre have a higher fat content and be more calorically dense than American cuisine, moderation is likely to prevent a French dieter from over consumption. Howeve habits, and culture are so intertwined, it may be difficult to determine whether d habits play a larger role in overall health. Regardless, the French will continue t and enjoy their chocolate while remaining happy, trim, and healthy.

References:

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