

The Sonoma Diet: Weight Loss and Other Benefits

ABSTRACT

The Sonoma Diet is advertised as a way to get fit and be healthy.

It allows one to eat like the southern Europeans do and reap the benefits that they have: slimmer bodies and lower rates of obesity and heart disease(1). However, compared to a thoroughly justified nutrition plan, the *Willett Food Pyramid*, *The Sonoma Diet* may not provide all the nutrition necessary(9). Peer-reviewed articles in nutrition journals were analyzed to compare *The Sonoma Diet* against *Willett*. It was found that *The Sonoma Diet* is nutritionally sound and can possibly be used for weight loss as well as overall health promotion and disease prevention.

INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma Diet (SD) is a diet developed by Connie Guttersen, R.D, Ph.D. The SD’s basis, the Mediterranean diet, is not a trademarked diet, but rather a style of eating in southern Europe, esp. Greece (1). Researchers noticed that people in these countries who ate in the traditional Mediterranean way were healthier, had lower rates of obesity and heart disease, and had lower cholesterol compared to people in Western societies eating an American diet, i.e. more meat and fat, less vegetables and whole grains. Scientists made a connection between diet and health and it is now widely accepted that the Mediterranean diet is a healthful way of eating to prevent disease and promote an optimal weight.(2, 6, 8)

The SD took all of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and the research about its benefits and turned it into a marketable diet plan for weight loss. The SD promotes healthful eating and claims that dieting should be about enjoying food and not about deprivation. However, The SD outlines which foods should be enjoyed readily and which should not. Some may feel that the guidelines are based on common sense. Eat smaller portions, eat more vegetables, eat whole grains, eat less meat, drink wine, and if you eat meat, be sure it is lean.(1) The SD encourages drinking wine for its health benefits. Some people object to alcohol, but in southern Europe, red wine is well-accepted, and the health benefits are well-documented (10).

It is my hypothesis that when one makes the best possible food choices on SD, it meets the recommendations of the Willett food pyramid. It might improve overall health and facilitate weight loss.

METHOD

There is almost no non-commercial information on SD, but it is almost identical to the Mediterranean diet (2). The method used was finding peer reviewed articles on the Mediterranean diet. Also, I examined SD’s own website and the claims that it makes. Two thoroughly researched diets, The Willett Food pyramid and The China Study, were used for comparison. Two meal choices, chosen by me based on the SD’s guidelines and meal suggestions, were analyzed. Fig. 2a shows a meal that is judged balanced by the SD guidelines, while Fig. 2b shows a meal I constructed while trying to make nutritionally unsound selections.

RESULTS

-The SD meets nutritional needs based on the Willett food pyramid (fig. 1)

-Surprisingly the “poor” meal choice(fig. 2b) on the SD provides more calcium and less cholesterol than the “balanced” meal (fig. 2a).

-The balanced meal probably provides more protein than is actually necessary according to Willett (fig. 2a).

-The balanced meal shown for the SD has the potential to meet the Willett food pyramid’s recommendations for daily intake (fig. 1, 2a, 4). However, fruit is not emphasized because of its sugar and carbohydrate content, and calcium is lacking. (1, 3, 4)

- The SD (fig. 3) provides health benefits for disease prevention.(2, 7, 8)

Figure 1 (9) : Willett Food Pyramid



Figure 2a (3) : SD Meal 1- Balanced

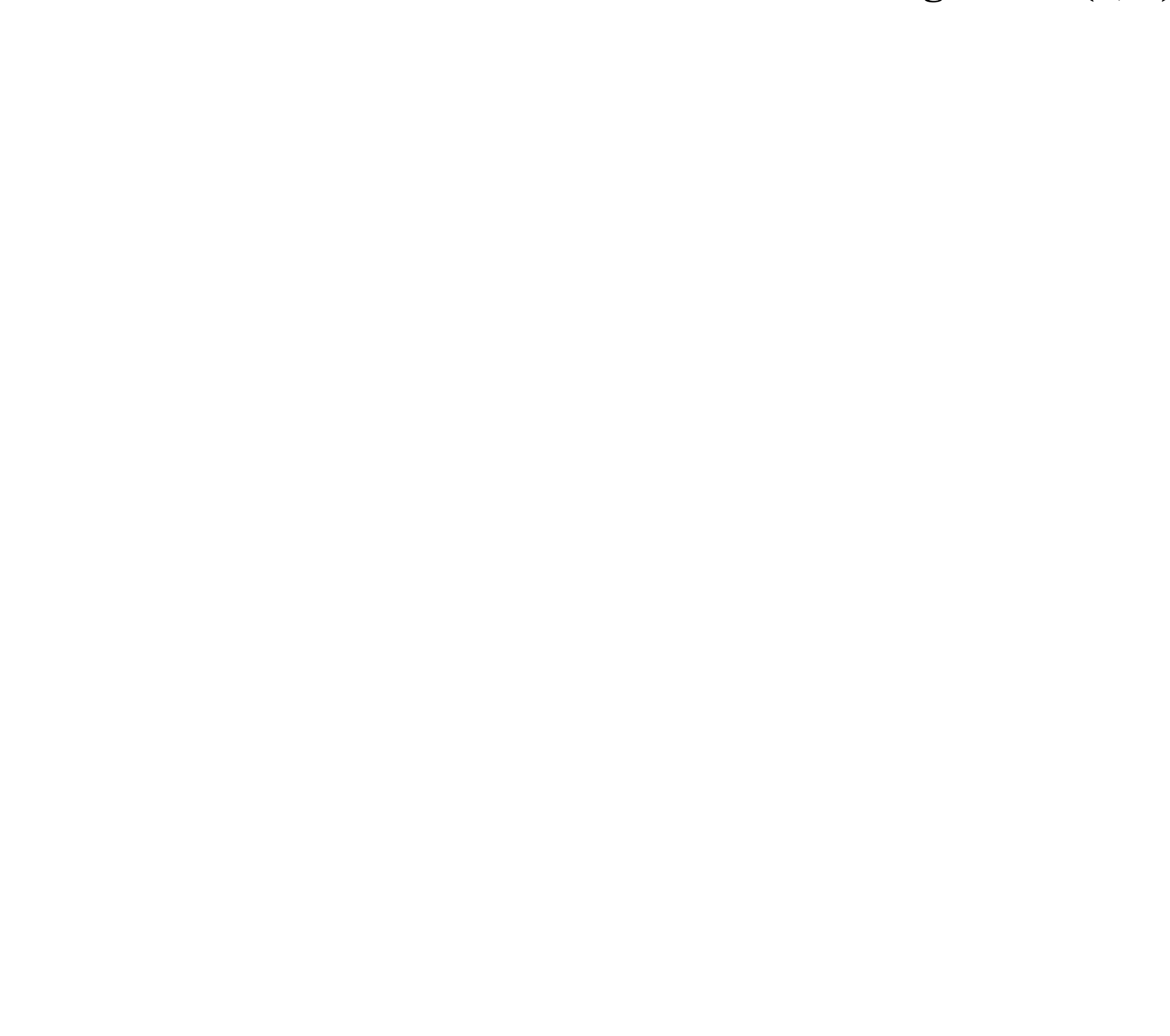
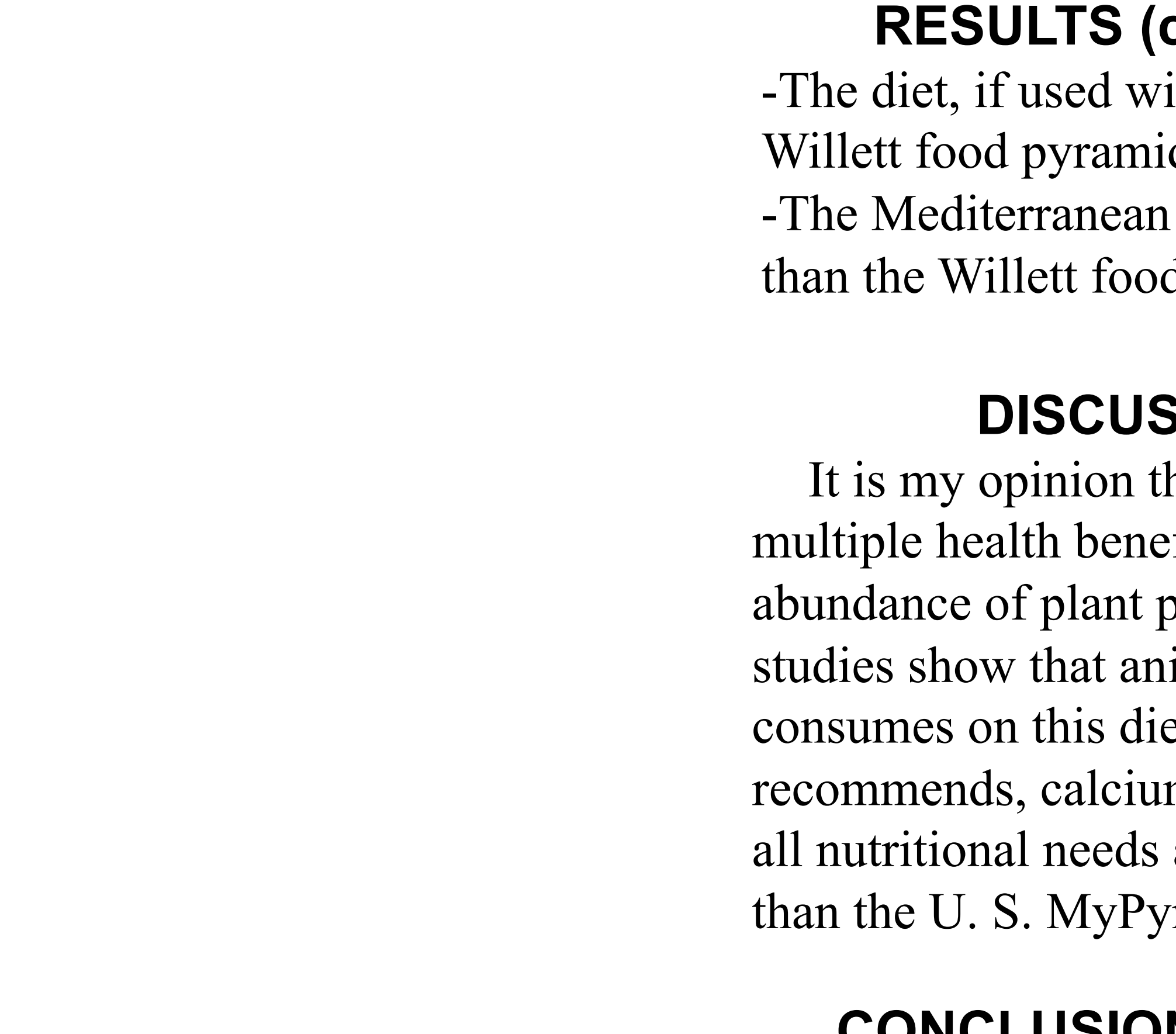


Figure 2b (3, 4) : SD Meal 2



By Marta Bornstein, Beloit College, Beloit, WI

Figure 3 (1, 2, 6, 8) :



RESULTS (cont’d)

-The diet, if used with judgment, has the potential for health benefits as well as meeting the nutritional needs of the Willett food pyramid (9) (fig. 1, 4).

-The Mediterranean diet food pyramid (fig. 4) is a good basis for nutrition and emphasizes different health benefits(fig. 3) than the Willett food pyramid (fig. 1) while still providing adequate nutrition. (7)

DISCUSSION

It is my opinion that SD could improve overall health. The evidence shows that eating in a Mediterranean (SD) style has multiple health benefits (table 3). Animal protein, a health hazard according to Willett, is not an issue because of the abundance of plant protein one consumes on this diet. Although animal protein is permitted in small quantities, most studies show that animal protein is actually unnecessary and potentially harmful. I still question the amount of calcium one consumes on this diet. However, with the addition of a calcium supplement, which the Willett food pyramid actually recommends, calcium should not be a major issue. One daily meal plan (only sample meal shown) has the potential to meet all nutritional needs according to Willett. Even the “poor” meal on The SD is decent, although it contains more cholesterol than the U. S. MyPyramid recommends.

CONCLUSION

The Sonoma Diet appears to provide adequate nutrition if consumed with good judgment. Making choices resulting in the “balanced” meal plan would clearly lead to many more health benefits than the “poor” meal. However, judgment is always necessary when it comes to good nutrition. The SD, contrary to my original hypothesis, does provide enough protein as well as calcium (given a calcium supplement if medically indicated). Multivitamins, which the Willett food pyramid recommends, might make this diet even more acceptable to some people.

REFERENCES

- 1) "About the Diet, Food and Recipes." *The Sonoma Diet*. 2007. Waterfront Media. 24 Sept. 2007 <www.the.sonoma.diet.com>.
- 2) Kushi, Lh, Eb Lenart, and Wc Willett. "Health Implications of Mediterranean Diets in Light of Contemporary Knowledge. 1. Plant Foods and Dairy Products." 61. Abstract. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (1995): 1407s-1415s.
- 3) "Nutrition Data: Nutrition Facts and Calorie Counter." *Nutrition Data*. 2007. CondeNet. 22 Sept. 2007 <www.nutritiondata.com>.
- 4) "Nutritional Information on Macaroni, Whole-Wheat, Cooked." *ELook.Org*. 2007. 24 Sept. 2007 <www.elook.org/nutrition/grains>.
- 5) Schroder, Helmut, Jaume Marrugat, Juan Vila, Maria L. Covas, and Rovert Elosua. "Adherence to the Traditional Mediterranean Diet is Inversely Associated with Body Mass Index and Obesity in a Spanish Population." Abstract. *The Journal of Nutrition* (2004): 134:3355- 3361.
- 6) Simopoulos, Artemis P. "The Mediterranean Diets: What is So Special About the Diet of Greece? The Scientific Evidence." Abstract. *The Journal of Nutrition* (2001): 131:3056s- 3073s.
- 7) "The Mediterranean Diet." Women’s Heart Foundations. 2005. Women’s Heart Foundation Inc. 20 Oct. 2007 <http://www.womensheartfoundation.org/content/Nutrition/mediterranean.asp.>
- 8) Trichopoulou, Antonia, Androniki Naska, Philippos Orfanos, and Dimitrios Trichopoulou. "Mediterranean Diet in Relation to Body Mass Index and Waist-to-Hip Ratio: the Greek European Prospective Investigation Into Cancer and Nutritional Study." 82. Abstract. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2005): 935-940.
- 9) "Willett Food Pyrrmaid." *Fitness in Training*. 2007. 27 Sept. 2007 <www.fitnesstraining.com>.
- 10) Sundstrom, Laura, "Health Benefits of Red Wine", 2 Nov 2007, < http://beloit.edu/~ordman/posters/posterindices/zpostersalcohol.htm >.

Figure 4 (7) : Guidance for the Mediterranean Diet

