

Eating around the world

Pack your bags. Renew your passport. And ask the neighbor to check your mail. We're going on a diet! No, not the kind of diet you're used to—we're jet-setting to find out how healthier nations stay slim.

FIRST STOP: FRANCE

Between the flaky croissants, savory cheeses and delectable pastries, you'd think that the French have similar—if not higher—rates of obesity than Americans. They don't.

How do they do it? Well, it's not *what* they eat, it's *how*.

Traditionally, the French eat their biggest meal in the middle of the day, giving them all afternoon to work off the calories. But don't think they gobble down a meal at

their desks. Lunch is a leisurely event, lasting between one and two hours. Eating slowly can help you control portion sizes and aids weight loss, according to the American Dietetic Association.

And how can we discuss France without mentioning the wine? "There is some evidence that small amounts of wine can have beneficial effects on heart disease and longevity," says Katherine Tallmadge, M.A., R.D., a spokeswoman for the association.

SECOND STOP: GREECE

Mediterranean countries like Greece traditionally eat diets



Foreign Relations

A nutritious diet isn't the only thing that contributes to good health. But it is an important factor. See how we compare with France, Greece and Japan.

	Life Expectancy (in years)	Overweight* Prevalence	High Blood Pressure*	Average Cholesterol
France	M: 75.6/F: 82.9	23%	29.7%	217.6
Greece	M: 75.5/F: 80.8	41.9%	30.2%	193
Japan	M: 77.9/F: 84.7	24.2%	36.7%	201.5
United States	M: 74.3/F: 79.5	64.5%**	20.1%	203.1

Sources: World Health Organization, Global InfoBase

*Overweight is defined as a body mass index of 25 or above. High blood pressure is defined as SBP 140 or DBP 90 mm HG or higher.

**Source: American Obesity Association

high in fat. In fact, Greeks, like Americans, get a significant portion of their daily calories from fat.

Fat can be healthy—if you eat the right types of fat. The difference here is that meat is a very small part of the traditional Greek diet. Much of their fat intake comes from olive oil.

Greeks use olive oil much like we use butter. They cook with it, dip their bread in it and add it to meals for flavor. But unlike butter, olive oil contains monounsaturated fat—



a healthy type of fat that actually may help lower your cholesterol, according to the American Heart Association (AHA).

THIRD STOP: JAPAN

Like Greece, Japan's traditional diet is light on meat, but the Japanese diet isn't short on protein. Fish and soy products more than make up for the limited red meat and poultry.

The AHA recommends eating fatty fish such as salmon, trout and

herring, which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, at least twice a week for a healthy heart. Soy also contains omega-3s, as well as fiber and B vitamins.

FINAL DESTINATION: A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE

Now that we're back home, it's time to make over our diets. "It can be done," Tallmadge says. "We have so many incredible foods available to us. We just need to make better choices." ■

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