

Greek researchers get to bottom of prostate cancer and physical activity

According to a University of Athens study, men who sit and work at desk jobs are much more likely to develop prostate cancer than men who stand and work at manual labor jobs. The article that summarizes the Greek researchers' work is entitled "Occupational physical activity in relation with prostate cancer and benign prostatic hyperplasia." It is published in the August 2008 issue of the European Journal of Cancer Prevention (17(4): 336-339).

The authors of the article are Areti Lagiou; Evi Samoli; Christina Georgila; Ploumi Minaki; Anastasia Barbouni; Anastasia Tzonou; Dimitrios Trichopoulos; and Pagona Lagiou, all associated with the University of Athens, Greece. The Greek researchers, led by Pagona Lagiou, used data from two studies, which were conducted between 1994 and 1997. They examined the relationship between the level of occupational physical activity (from sedate to rigor-

ous activity) and the risk of prostate cancer and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

Dr. Lagiou is an adjunct associate professor of epidemiology (Department of Epidemiology) at Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.; associate professor of hygiene and epidemiology at the University of Athens Medical School, Greece; and adjunct associate professor of epidemiology at Karolinska Institutet, Sweden.

BPH is defined as the benign enlargement of the prostate (BEP), which is a non-life-threatening (benign) condition (that often requires surgery) where the prostate increases in size especially in middle-aged and elderly men, making it difficult to urinate. The prostate only affects men because it is part of the male reproductive system. The Greek researchers studied 320 patients with "histological confirmed incident prostate cancer" and 184 patients with "surgically treated PHP," as stated with-

in the abstract to their paper. In addition, 246 patients, who were hospitalized for minor conditions, were used as a control group. The researchers independently and blindly grouped the men's occupations before retirement as either being of high, medium, or low physical activity levels, along with controlling for educational level. They then asked the men questions relating to their jobs.

The researchers concluded that "...there was a suggestive inverse association of physical activity with prostate cancer (P for trend 0.12) and a significant one with BPH (P for trend 0.04). The odds ratio (95% confidence interval) for high versus low activity was 0.69 (0.40-1.22) for prostate cancer and 0.59 (0.31-1.11) for BPH."

It continues to say, "The association of physical activity with both conditions tended to be more pronounced among men 65 years old or younger. Given the high frequency of occurrence of the examined conditions in the male population and our limited knowledge

about other modifiable risk factors, preventive measures may have to focus on increasing physical activity." In other words, men in sedentary jobs were found to be 31% more likely to have prostate cancer and 41% more likely to have a non-cancerous condition called BPH.

According to the News.com.au article "Desk jobs increase risk of prostate cancer," "Men who worked as civil servants, teachers or in office jobs were much more likely to get cancer than those who spend much of their day on their feet, such as labourers, bakers, and barbers." The study by the Greek researchers confirms the benefit of regular exercise for men, especially if men work at sedate jobs where they sit all day. In fact, Dr. Lagiou states in the News.com.au article, "In 1997, physical activity was not even listed as a possible protective factor against prostate cancer. During the last decade, however, evidence has accumulated it may convey protection."

Food is at the heart of Greek civilisation

"YOU must eat today as though tomorrow will never come." My Greek host's yiayia, or grandmother, waves her arm over the table. 'Here, as elsewhere in Greece, the day's routine is set by meal times'

It is covered with plates of mezedes, the Greek equivalent of Spanish tapas. There's gigantes (giant lima beans in a tomato salsa), melitzanosalata (a dip of eggplant puree) and saganaki (a deliciously fresh fried cheese served with lemon). These are merely the starters. Just when I think I've consumed enough to satisfy yiayia, she urges, "Eat!"

Most Greeks, especially the elderly, have a love affair with food. Younger generations, whose first memories include their grandparents running after them with spoonfuls of freshly cooked fare, attribute the fixation to a war syndrome.

During World War II and the ensuing civil war, people struggled to survive in Greece: there was never enough food to go around. The country's economic, political and social despair prompted the famous exodus of Greeks to Australia, Canada and the US.

The Greek food obsession extends beyond lingering memories of hunger; it is integral to the Greek sense of *filoxenia*, or hospitality. *Filoxenia*, the roots of which are tied in with religious beliefs and festivities, is extended to all visitors, whether they are in a formal meeting or have dropped in for a chat.

Hospitality is courtesy, and courtesy means food, as I discover during my tour of the Peloponnese.

The Peloponnese, the large peninsula of mainland Greece separated by the Corinth Canal, is 80km southwest of Athens.

My first stop is the stunning port of Nafplio, the first capital of modern Greece. Perched on a peninsula and set beneath two fortresses, the town is a gourmet paradise. Cafes and restaurants line the waterfront or are nestled in narrow alleyways among the Venetian-style mansions.



'Here, as elsewhere in Greece, the day's routine is set by meal times'

Here, as elsewhere in Greece, the day's routine is set by meal times. About 10pm each evening, families come out en masse to feast on several courses.

In the mornings, the older men meet at the *kafeneia*, the traditional coffee house, to confer with friends over their worry beads and coffee. An hour or two later, trendy youths sporting Dolce & Gabbana T-shirts, Gucci sunglasses and carrying the latest-model mobile phone descend on the cafe of the moment to linger over their frothy-topped iced coffees.

Away from the fashionable cafe crowd, Nafplio's gastronomic scene extends to its tiny streets. At Amalias5, I discover Dimitris Karonis the wine man, whose shop Karonis carries an impressive range of Greek wines, including the local Nemean reds. At Antica Gelateria di Roma (at the corner of Farmakopoulou and Komninou), Italian gelati maestro Marcello Raffo (pictured) enthusiastically hands out small spoonfuls of superlative homemade ice cream. He is of the old school: only fresh ingredients -- fruit, milk and sugar -- are used.

The nearby honey shop Nectar & Ambrosia is run by the charismatic Nikos. He proudly claims to produce the best honey in Greece and, as I swoon over a

spoonful of thyme-infused nectar, I agree. Once a year, Nikos transports his bees to Tripoli to feed on the region's superior pollen.

From Nafplio, I head south towards the Mani, passing the snow-capped Taygetos mountain range, the base of which is covered in wild herbs and olive groves, though many were destroyed by bushfires in June.

At Gerolimenas, a tiny fishing village nestled around a compact, sheltered bay on the Inner Mani's west coast, a plush five-star hotel is housed in a 14th-century feudal Maniot tower.

Alexandros Kyrimis, owner of the Kyrimai Hotel, speaks proudly of his conversion of the family's former trading post. Like the establishment's decor, its cuisine is unashamedly contemporary.

The restaurant's high-profile consultant chef, Yiannis Baxevanis, creates Greek and French fusion dishes. Greek cooks here are usually traditionalists but my evening meal of caramelised octopus served with fava in a cocktail glass is an invigorating change.

I am invited to sample goat with mushrooms, currants and chestnuts, and fried cod with beetroot and garlic sauce. Alexandros orders Ktima Gerovasiliou, an aromatic white wine that is a perfect accompaniment for Mediterranean fare.

However, local and regional specialties are what make eating so special in the Peloponnese. Everywhere I travel, delicacies abound, whether to Leonidio for its pale purple, streaky Tsakoniki aubergine (there is an annual aubergine festival in August), Kalamata for its large, crimson olives or the region of Nafplio for its citrus fruits.

All over the Peloponnese I am plied with *glyko tou koutaliou* -- fruits stewed in a sugary syrup -- and freshly baked *baklava*, oozing a nutty, sticky sweetness.

And Greek *fetta* cheese (the best is made by the villagers) has been afforded the same protection of origin status as champagne in France.

Article from The Australian