

DID YOU KNOW?

Just 5.8 per cent of women in Norway are considered to be significantly overweight, making its people among the slimmest in the developed world, the World Health Organization says.

SAY HELLO TO THE NORDIC DIET

A food philosophy based on eating more fish and berries is sweeping the world. Could it be Australia's next big weight-loss trend? Gina Flaxman investigates



PHOTOGRAPHY: AUSTRAL

Scandinavia may be best known for its glacial fjords, IKEA and stylish TV crime shows. But now you can add health to the list thanks to the Nordic diet – a traditional style of eating from Norway, Sweden and Denmark that's rich in berries, vegetables and oily fish – which is making waves around the world.

A pan-Nordic group of researchers, including scientists from Sweden's Lund University, followed 166 people with metabolic syndrome (a cluster of conditions that raise the risk of problems such as heart disease and diabetes) for between 18 and 24 weeks. The study, which was published in the Journal of Internal Medicine, found that subjects who ate a "healthy Nordic diet" had significantly improved cholesterol levels.

Meanwhile, researchers at the University of Copenhagen, in Denmark, have devised the New Nordic Diet, to reflect a movement in Scandinavian cuisine that's based around traditional, seasonal and local ingredients.

The researchers tested the diet on 147 obese men and women, with an average

waist circumference of 100cm, over 26 weeks. The group following the New Nordic Diet lost an average of 4.7kg, while those on an "average Danish diet" lost 1.5kg. The New Nordic Diet participants also showed greater reductions in blood pressure.

The healthy Nordic diets in these two studies follow similar principles and involve eating mostly wholegrains, fruit (with a focus on berries), vegetables (particularly potatoes, cabbage and root veg), canola oil, and oily fish three times a week. The New Nordic Diet places more emphasis on nutrient-dense foods that have been grown in the wild and on seasonal, organic produce.

Following a Nordic diet is easy in Europe, where the climate is more suited to many of the foods specified, but could it become as popular in sunny Australia?

"This diet was designed for the Nordic environment and some aspects will need to be modified to suit the Australian population, otherwise it will be expensive and contradict the diet's philosophy," Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) spokesperson Georgie Rist says.

Most of the diet's principles are in line with the DAA and national healthy eating guidelines, Rist adds. The philosophy of sustainable, seasonal eating is also one that's being embraced by our chefs. In Australia, the levels of chemical residue in food are regulated, so all food is safe to eat, regardless of whether or not it's organic, Rist explains, adding that both

organic and conventionally-grown produce can provide all the nutrients required if you follow a healthy, balanced diet.

HOW TO EAT NORDIC

+ LESS RED MEAT, MORE FISH Both Nordic diets emphasise eating less red meat. When you do eat meat it should be high quality and lean (such as kangaroo). You should also up your intake of oily fish. "This will increase healthy omega-3 fats and decrease your levels of unhealthy saturated fats," Rist says. "Omega-3s are important for our heart, brain, joints, eyes, mood and nervous system." She says the average national intake of omega-3s is 246 milligrams per day. This is below the recommendation of 610mg a day for men and 430mg for women.






+ SNACK ON BERRIES Favour red and purple berries, in particular, as these are high in antioxidants, the natural plant compounds that offer protection from cancer, heart disease and strokes.

+ EAT RYE BREAD Rye bread is a Nordic staple, and Rist says it's one of the best grain sources of fibre available. "It contains approximately three times more fibre than white wheat bread. Rye is also rich in magnesium, B vitamins, iron, zinc, phytochemicals and antioxidants." Rye promotes a feeling of fullness, so it helps with weight loss. It also helps manage blood sugars and cholesterol levels and promotes a healthy bowel.

PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW NORDIC DIET

- 1 EAT MORE FRUIT AND VEGETABLES (BERRIES, CABBAGE, ROOT VEG, LEGUMES, POTATOES AND HERBS)
- 2 EAT MORE WHOLEGRAINS (ESPECIALLY RYE, OATS AND BARLEY)
- 3 EAT MORE FOOD FROM THE SEAS AND LAKES
- 4 EAT HIGHER-QUALITY MEAT, BUT LESS OF IT
- 5 EAT MORE FOOD FROM WILD LANDSCAPES
- 6 EAT ORGANIC PRODUCE WHERE POSSIBLE
- 7 AVOID FOOD ADDITIVES
- 8 EAT MORE MEALS THAT ARE BASED ON SEASONAL PRODUCE
- 9 EAT MORE MEALS THAT ARE HOME-COOKED
- 10 PRODUCE LESS WASTE

SCANDO STAPLES AND AUSSIE ALTERNATIVES

	NORDIC	AUSTRALIAN
BERRIES 	Lingonberries, cloudberries and bilberries	Blueberries, blackberries, mulberries and raspberries, either fresh or frozen
OILY FISH 	Herring and mackerel	Salmon, mackerel and sardines
MEAT 	Lean wild animals such as elk and reindeer	Kangaroo, venison and rabbit
COOKING OIL 	Canola oil	Extra-virgin olive oil, canola oil and high oleic sunflower oil
BREAD 	Rugbrød (Danish rye bread)	Wholegrain and sourdough rye

+ HAVE MORE ROOT VEG Because of their cold climate, Scandinavians eat lots of potatoes and root veges. "These vegetables are an excellent source of fibre, magnesium and potassium," Rist says.

+ USE OILS LOW IN SATURATED FAT The Nordic cooking oil staple is canola, as it's manufactured from a cool-climate crop (rapeseeds). It's low in saturated fat

but rich in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. Australians also have easy access to other oils with a similar fat ratio, such as extra-virgin olive oil, which is also good for heart health and wellbeing.



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