

Mediterranean diet may ward off asthma, allergies

Wed Apr 11, 2007 5:52PM EDT

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A traditional Mediterranean diet rich in fruits, vegetables and nuts during childhood appears to protect against symptoms of asthma and nasal allergies, according to a new study.

"There has been increasing interest in the role of nutrition in the development of asthma, and in the modulating effect of nutrition on environmental exposures," Dr. Paul Cullinan, of Royal Brompton Hospital and National Heart and Lung Institute, London, UK, and colleagues write in the medical journal *Thorax*.

In their study, the researchers surveyed 690 children between the ages of 7 and 18 years in rural Crete. Parents completed questionnaires on their children's respiratory and allergic symptoms, and diets.

The team reports that 80 percent of children ate fresh fruit and 68 percent ate vegetables at least twice a day.

Intake of grapes, oranges, apples, and fresh tomatoes protected against wheeze and nasal allergies, and a high intake of nuts reduced the likelihood of wheezing, Cullinan and associates found. Margarine, on the other hand, was linked to an increased risk of wheeze nasal allergies.

"A diet high in antioxidants may prevent the expression of allergic disease in this population," the investigators conclude.

SOURCE: *Thorax*, online April 5, 2007.