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In a new study, adults with higher intakes of fresh fruit, pasta, and rice and lower intakes of meat were more likely to have a leaner body and a lower BMI, two factors associated with better long-term health outcomes.

NUTRIENT AND ENERGY INTAKES AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS WITH LOWER BMI IN U.S. ADULTS

Previous research has clearly shown that a reduction in total energy intake (calories) results in weight loss regardless of the macronutrient content of the diet. Less information is available, however, regarding specific dietary patterns that favor leanness in free-living populations. Leanness is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or less.

In a new study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, researchers examined the associations of typical energy, food, and nutrient intakes with BMI among U.S. participants of the International Study of Macro-/Micronutrients and Blood Pressure (INTERMAP).

This study included 1,794 American adults 40-59 years who participated in a large international cross-sectional study of dietary factors and blood pressure. The subjects were not consuming a special diet. Researchers used 24-hour dietary recalls and 24-hour urine collections to compile information on dietary intake, physical activity and BMI.

Lower calorie intake was associated with a lower BMI in both men and women. Higher intakes of fresh fruit, pasta, and rice and lower intakes of meat were associated with lower BMI. Lower urinary sodium and intakes of total and animal protein, dietary cholesterol, saturated fats, and heme iron (iron from animal sources) and higher urinary potassium and intakes of carbohydrates, dietary fiber, and magnesium were associated with a lower BMI in adults.

Diets higher in nutrient-dense carbohydrate and lower in animal protein and saturated fat are associated with lower total energy intakes, more favorable micronutrient intakes, and lower BMI. Since a high BMI is related to an increased risk of many health disorders, this dietary pattern may be important in maintaining a leaner BMI and reducing several risk factors associated with obesity.

Shay CM et al. Food and nutrient intakes and their associations with lower BMI in middle-aged US adults: the International Study of Macro-/Micronutrients and Blood Pressure (INTERMAP). Am J Clin Nutr September 2012; vol. 96 no. 3 483-491.