# Switching to a Western diet could harm your health in just two weeks



Recent research has highlighted significant health implications stemming from dietary shifts, particularly focusing on the transition from traditional diets to Western-style foods. Scientists from Radboud University Medical Center in the Netherlands and KCMC University in Tanzania conducted a study that revealed concerning effects on the immune system and inflammation levels after just two weeks of consuming a Western diet.

The study explored participants' diets in Tanzania, known to embody the heritage of the Chagga people from Mount Kilimanjaro. This traditional African diet is plant-based and includes a variety of foods such as plantains, beans, millet, and sorghum, complemented by a fermented banana drink. The diet is characterised by its low levels of harmful fats, salt, and added sugars, aspects that starkly contrast with the typical Western diet, which is heavily reliant on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) such as white bread, fast food, and sugary snacks. It's notable that UPFs account for 57 per cent of total energy intake in the UK, making it one of the highest levels in Europe.

In conducting their research, the scientists involved 77 healthy men from both urban and rural areas in Tanzania. Participants were divided into groups based on their usual diets – some adhered to their traditional diet while others switched to a Western diet for two weeks. One additional group maintained their regular diet but incorporated the fermented banana drink daily.

Dr Quirijn de Mast, one of the authors of the study, explained the fundamental principle underlying the traditional diet: "The core principle is unprocessed, fibre-rich foods." He pointed out that urbanisation, globalisation, and increased access to processed foods are leading to a decline in the consumption of traditional African diets.

Results indicated that participants who switched to a Western diet experienced intensified inflammation and weakened immune responses, risks that could exacerbate chronic health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Dr de Mast remarked, “Inflammation is at the root of many chronic diseases. What’s remarkable is that these harmful effects can start after just two weeks on an unhealthy diet.”

Conversely, those who reverted to their heritage diet or consumed the fermented beverage exhibited a significant anti-inflammatory response. This suggests the lasting health benefits of a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and fibre, which support gut health and contribute to overall well-being.

The findings stimulate a discourse about the potential health advantages of traditional African diets, positing them as formidable contenders alongside the Mediterranean diet, which is lauded for its olive oil, fish, and high fibre content. Dr de Mast further emphasised the necessity of acknowledging the nutritional value inherent within Africa's diverse traditional diets.

As modern lifestyles evolve and incidences of lifestyle diseases rise in many regions of Africa, this study underscores an essential shift in dietary discussions, advocating for a greater appreciation of traditional African food practices and their health benefits. Research in this domain continues to gain momentum, indicating that traditional diets may hold keys to enhancing health outcomes globally.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://bioengineer.org/inflammation-linked-to-western-diet-traditional-african-cuisine-offers-protective-benefits/> - This article supports the claim that a Western diet can lead to increased inflammation and weakened immune responses, whereas traditional African diets offer protective benefits. It highlights a study showing that switching to a Western diet for just two weeks can have significant health implications.
* <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/04/250403122811.htm> - This report details the harmful effects of Western diets and the benefits of traditional African diets on inflammation and immune function. It emphasizes the significant impact of dietary changes even over short periods.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides an overview of recent research highlighting health implications of dietary shifts from traditional diets to Western-style foods. It discusses the study conducted in Tanzania and its findings on traditional African diets.
* <https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41591-025-03602-0> - This DOI links to the research publication in Nature Medicine, detailing the study on the health effects of traditional African versus Western diets. The study focused on immune and metabolic effects in men.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4025514/> - Although not directly related to this specific article, this URL provides information on the general benefits of traditional diets, which can support discussions on the health advantages of plant-based diets like the traditional African diet.