HOME

The 1,000-Year-Old Viking Diet Is Making a Comeback — Here's How It May Lower Cholesterol, Blood Pressure, and Blood Sugar

By bestfolkmedicine · 28/11/2026 · 9 min read



Long before supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, artificial sweeteners, and highly processed snacks existed, the Vikings relied on foods provided by the forests, fields, rivers, and seas of Northern Europe.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(122); });

Their meals consisted of seasonal vegetables, wild berries, fish, grains, meat, nuts, and fermented dairy products.

More than a thousand years later, this ancient approach to eating is attracting renewed attention as people search for healthier alternatives to the modern Western diet.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(130); });
Meanwhile, scientists have been investigating a contemporary eating pattern inspired by traditional Scandinavian foods, known as the healthy Nordic diet.

But could returning to some of these ancient eating habits improve our health? And which aspects of the Viking diet are better left in the past?

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(131); });

What Did the Vikings Actually Eat?

The Viking Age lasted approximately from the late eighth to the eleventh century.

Contrary to the popular image of Vikings surviving almost exclusively on meat and alcohol, their diets included a considerable variety of plant and animal foods.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(132); });
Their food choices depended on geography, seasonal availability, agricultural production, and social circumstances.

Historical and archaeological evidence indicates that grains, vegetables, dairy, fish, and meat were all important components of their diet.

They also relied on preservation techniques such as drying, smoking, salting, and fermentation to survive the long Scandinavian winters.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(133); });
Unlike modern consumers, Vikings had little choice but to eat according to seasonal availability.

Eight Foods That Defined the Viking Diet

1. Fatty Fish

Fish was an important source of nutrition, particularly for communities living near coastlines, rivers, and lakes.

Salmon, herring, and mackerel provide omega-3 fatty acids, high-quality protein, vitamin D, selenium, and vitamin B12.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(134); });
Modern nutritional research associates regular fish consumption with cardiovascular health, particularly when fish replaces less nutritious sources of protein.

2. Whole Grains

Barley, rye, and oats were valuable dietary staples throughout Northern Europe.

They were commonly used to prepare porridge, bread, and other simple meals.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(135); });
Whole grains provide dietary fiber, magnesium, B vitamins, and other important nutrients.

Oats and barley also contain beta-glucans, a type of soluble fiber that can help reduce LDL cholesterol when consumed in sufficient quantities.

3. Root Vegetables

Root vegetables were particularly valuable because many could be stored throughout colder months.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(136); });
Turnips, carrots, and other locally available vegetables provided carbohydrates, dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, and naturally occurring antioxidants.

Today, root vegetables remain an affordable and nutritious alternative to many highly processed carbohydrate sources.

4. Wild Berries

Bilberries, raspberries, and other seasonal fruits provided important nutrients and naturally occurring plant compounds.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(137); });
Dark-colored berries are particularly rich in anthocyanins, pigments that have attracted scientific interest for their antioxidant properties and potential cardiovascular benefits.

Modern research continues to investigate how regular berry consumption may influence vascular function, inflammation, and metabolic health.

5. Nuts and Seeds

Hazelnuts and other available nuts provided concentrated energy, healthy fats, protein, and minerals.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(138); });
Nuts remain an important component of several modern dietary patterns associated with cardiovascular health.

They are particularly valuable sources of magnesium, vitamin E, unsaturated fatty acids, and dietary fiber.

6. Fermented Dairy Products

Milk, cheese, and other dairy products were important sources of protein, fat, and calcium.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(139); });
Fermentation helped preserve dairy products before refrigeration existed.

Modern fermented dairy products, such as plain yogurt and cultured milk, can provide valuable nutrients. Some also contain live bacterial cultures that may support digestive health.

However, not every fermented dairy product contains live probiotics.

7. Meat and Eggs

Vikings obtained animal protein from livestock, poultry, eggs, and, depending on their location, hunting.

These foods provided important nutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin B12, and essential amino acids.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(140); });
However, modern nutrition guidelines recommend limiting excessive consumption of red meat and processed meat, particularly products high in saturated fat and sodium.

8. Onions, Garlic, and Leafy Vegetables

Onions, garlic, leeks, cabbage, and other vegetables provided additional nutrients and helped diversify meals.

These foods contain dietary fiber and various bioactive compounds that researchers continue to investigate for their potential influence on metabolic and cardiovascular health.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(141); });
Their inclusion in a varied diet remains a valuable nutritional habit today.

What Is the Modern Nordic Diet?

Although the Viking diet and the modern Nordic diet share certain ingredients, they are not identical.

The healthy Nordic diet is a contemporary dietary pattern inspired by traditional foods available in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(142); });
Unlike historical eating habits, it incorporates modern scientific knowledge about nutrition, cardiovascular disease, and long-term health.

It emphasizes vegetables, berries, legumes, whole grains, fish, nuts, seeds, vegetable oils, and moderate amounts of dairy.

It also encourages limiting processed meats, refined grains, added sugars, excessive salt, and alcohol.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(143); });
The idea is not to recreate the Viking lifestyle exactly but to combine traditional Scandinavian ingredients with modern nutritional science.

What Does Science Say About the Nordic Diet?

It May Help Lower Cholesterol

A randomized controlled trial published in the Journal of Internal Medicine examined the effects of a healthy Nordic dietary pattern in adults with elevated cholesterol.

Participants following the Nordic diet experienced improvements in cholesterol levels and other cardiovascular risk markers.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(144); });
Researchers believe that dietary fiber, unsaturated fats, whole grains, and replacing certain sources of saturated fat may contribute to these effects.

It May Support Healthy Blood Pressure

Several clinical studies have investigated the relationship between Nordic dietary patterns and blood pressure.

Results suggest that this approach to eating may help modestly reduce blood pressure, particularly among individuals with existing cardiometabolic risk factors.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(145); });
The combination of plant-rich foods, potassium, magnesium, fiber, and healthier fat sources may contribute to these benefits.

It May Improve Blood Sugar Regulation

Whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and nuts provide fiber that can help moderate digestion and the absorption of carbohydrates.

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in 2025 reported improvements in several cardiometabolic markers among participants following Nordic dietary patterns, including fasting

glucose and insulin.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(146); });
However, the magnitude of these benefits varies between individuals and studies.

It May Support Healthy Weight Management

Unlike many restrictive modern diets, the Nordic diet focuses primarily on food quality.

Fiber-rich foods and adequate protein can promote feelings of fullness, potentially making it easier to manage overall energy intake.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(147); });
Some clinical studies have reported modest improvements in body weight among individuals following Nordic dietary patterns.

Nevertheless, weight management depends on numerous factors, and following a Nordic diet does not guarantee weight loss.

It May Help Support a Healthy Inflammatory Response

Berries, vegetables, fish, nuts, and whole grains contain nutrients and bioactive compounds that may influence inflammatory processes.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(148); });
Although researchers have investigated the Nordic diet's effects on inflammatory biomarkers, findings are not uniformly consistent.

More research is needed to determine its specific long-term effects on chronic inflammation.

Importantly, these scientific studies examine the modern healthy Nordic diet, not the exact diet consumed by Vikings a thousand years ago.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(149); });

The Viking Diet vs. the Mediterranean Diet

Both dietary patterns emphasize minimally processed ingredients, seasonal produce, whole grains, fish, and plant foods.

However, they have several interesting differences.

Nordic Diet	Mediterranean Diet
Rapeseed oil	Extra virgin olive oil
Oats, barley, and rye	Whole wheat and other grains
Bilberries and raspberries	Grapes, figs, and citrus fruits
Herring, salmon, and mackerel	Sardines, anchovies, and other fish
Cabbage and root vegetables	Tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers
Cultured dairy products	Yogurt and traditional cheeses
Hazelnuts and other nuts	Almonds, walnuts, and pistachios

Both can provide valuable health benefits when properly balanced.

However, the Mediterranean diet currently has a more extensive body of long-term clinical research supporting its cardiovascular benefits.

The Dark Side of the Ancient Viking Diet

Despite its emphasis on traditional foods, historical Viking eating habits were not necessarily ideal for modern health.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(150); });
Depending on availability, some meals contained substantial amounts of animal fat, salted meat, and preserved fish.

Excessive sodium intake can contribute to elevated blood pressure, while high saturated fat consumption can increase LDL cholesterol, particularly when it replaces unsaturated fats.

Alcoholic beverages, including beer and mead, were also part of historical Scandinavian culture.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(151); });

Modern research does not support consuming alcohol for health benefits.

Furthermore, the Vikings faced nutritional shortages, infectious diseases, harsh living conditions, and limited medical care.

The fact that a dietary practice is ancient does not automatically make it healthier.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(152); });

How to Follow a Healthier Version of the Viking Diet Today

You do not need to recreate medieval Scandinavian meals to benefit from Nordic-inspired nutrition.

Instead, consider incorporating the most beneficial aspects of this traditional eating pattern into your daily routine:

- Replace refined breakfast cereals with whole-grain oats.
- Eat a variety of seasonal vegetables.
- Include berries regularly in your diet.
- Consume fatty fish according to dietary guidelines.
- Choose unsalted nuts and seeds as snacks.
- Include legumes as a source of plant protein.
- Choose plain, unsweetened fermented dairy products.
- Use rapeseed oil or olive oil instead of excessive amounts of animal fat.
- Reduce processed meats, sugary beverages, and highly processed snacks.
- Prepare more meals at home using minimally processed ingredients.

People with celiac disease should avoid rye and barley and choose certified gluten-free oats and other suitable gluten-free grains.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(153); });

A One-Day Modern Nordic Diet Meal Plan

Meal	What to eat
Breakfast	Oatmeal with bilberries, hazelnuts, and plain yogurt
Morning snack	An apple and a handful of unsalted nuts
Lunch	Salmon with roasted carrots, cabbage, and boiled potatoes
Afternoon snack	Plain yogurt with raspberries and seeds
Dinner	Homemade lentil soup with onions, garlic, root vegetables, and whole-grain bread
Drinks	Water and unsweetened herbal tea

This approach provides a practical combination of protein, healthy fats, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and naturally occurring plant compounds.

What Can Modern Society Learn From the Vikings?

Perhaps the most valuable lesson from ancient Scandinavian nutrition is not about a particular superfood.

It is about simplicity.

The Vikings lived in an environment where food was closely connected to nature, seasonal availability, and local production.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(154); });
Today, many people live in an environment where convenient, heavily processed foods are available around the clock.

Returning to some traditional eating habits, such as preparing meals at home, consuming more whole foods, eating seasonal produce, and reducing unnecessary added sugars, may offer meaningful health benefits.

These principles are supported by modern nutrition research rather than simply by historical tradition.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(155); });

Final Thoughts

The renewed interest in the ancient Viking diet reflects a broader desire to reconnect with traditional ways of eating.

While historical Viking meals were not always nutritionally ideal, many of their staple ingredients remain valuable components of a healthy modern diet.

Scientific research into the contemporary Nordic diet suggests potential benefits for cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar regulation, and overall cardiometabolic health.

ezstandalone.cmd.push(function () { ezstandalone.showAds(156); });
The goal should not be to abandon modern nutritional knowledge in favor of ancient practices but to combine the best aspects of both.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson from the Viking diet is that improving our nutrition does not always require discovering something new. Sometimes, it means rediscovering what previous generations already knew about simple, nourishing food.

Read online: https://bestfolkmedicine.com/2026/11/ancient-viking-diet-health-benefits-nordic-foods/
Downloaded on 28/11/2026

DISCLAIMER: We do not provide medical advice and nothing contained herein shall be construed as medical advice. The contents such as text, comments, graphics, images, videos and other content contained on this site are for informational purposes only. Statements on this website have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration, and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Always consult your personal physician before starting any fitness or exercise program or changing dietary habits. The content of this site is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. It is not a substitute for a medical exam, nor does it replace the need for services or counsel provided by medical professionals.