

## GREEK GASTRONOMY | Eleni Sakellis

## A Cheesefare Cheesecake Recipe to Make and Enjoy

During the final week before Great Lent, those getting ready for the strict fasting can still consume fish, eggs, and dairy products like milk, cheese, and butter. Cheesefare Sunday is the final Sunday before Clean Monday, Kathara Deftera, and the last day for enjoying dairy products. Cheesefare Sunday, is also called the Sunday of Forgiveness and focuses on the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, an event that shows us how far we have fallen in sin and separated ourselves from God, as noted on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website. The article points out that “at the onset of Great Lent and a period of intense fasting, this Sunday reminds us of our need for God’s forgiveness and guides our hearts, minds, and spiritual efforts on returning to Him in repentance.” Each region of Greece has wonderful traditional recipes to enjoy during this time of the year. Among the classic recipes are, of course, tyropites made with the delicious cheeses available in as many varieties as there are Greek cheeses and used in both sweet and savory recipes. Also among the traditional recipes enjoyed during Cheesefare are galatopites or milk pies, rice pudding, pies with trahana fillings, and loukoumades filled with mezithra. Cheesecake is another Greek favorite going back to ancient times.

## Cheesefare Cheesecake

- ▶ 3 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese, at room temperature
- ▶ 4 eggs, at room temperature
- ▶ 1/2 cup sugar
- ▶ 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ▶ 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- ▶ 1 cup whole milk or sour cream, at room temperature
- ▶ 2 (9-inch) store-bought graham cracker crusts or
- ▶ Homemade graham cracker crust, *recipe below*
- ▶ Greek jam or honey, for topping, optional

Set out the ingredients to bring them to room temperature. Cut the cream cheese into smaller pieces and set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat eggs and sugar until foamy. Add the cream cheese one piece at a time and beat until smooth. Add the vanilla extract, cornstarch and milk or sour cream and continue beating until smooth. Pour into two graham cracker crusts or prepared 9 or 10-inch springform pan. Bake in a preheated 375 degree F oven for 45 minutes over a water bath (place a large baking pan on the lower rack of your oven and fill with boiling water, bake the cheesecake on the rack above it for even baking) until lightly golden brown around the edge and set in the middle. Allow to cool completely on wire racks before topping the cheesecake. Homemade jams or preserves are a nice way to top cheesecake. Greek apricot or strawberry jams work well. For another Greek-inspired topping, try toasted walnuts drizzled with thyme honey from your favorite region of Greece.



MINK MINGLE, VIA UNSPLASH

## Graham Cracker Crust

- ▶ 1 1/2 cups graham crackers crumbs
- ▶ 2 tablespoons sugar
- ▶ 1/2 stick (4 tablespoons) unsalted butter, melted

In a small mixing bowl, stir together the graham cracker crumbs and the sugar. Add the melted butter and stir until well-combined. Press the mixture into the bottom of a 9 or 10-inch springform and up the sides using a measuring cup to press the crumbs evenly. You can use your hands to press the crust into place but a measuring cup gives a more even result. Fill with the cheesecake filling and bake according to the recipe.

## LITERARY REVIEW | Eleni Sakellis

## Fani Mallouchou-Tufano Explores the Metamorphoses of the Acropolis

While most of us view the Acropolis as the iconic and unchanging monument and symbol of the city of Athens and of Western civilization, it has undergone many transformations over the millennia. ‘From Castle to Monument: Metamorphoses of the Acropolis from the 19th to the 21st Century’ by Fani Mallouchou-Tufano focuses on the most recent of these transformations beginning in the 19th century up to the present day.

The book deals with the changes that the Acropolis landscape underwent during the 200 years of its most recent history and the successive transformations of the Acropolis from a fortified castle on the eve of the founding of the modern Greek state to the great monument and archaeological archetype of classical art we know today.

The book includes five sections in chronological order, starting from the end of the 18th century, when European interest turned to Greece, then under Ottoman rule, and it seemed everyone was just discovering the ancient Greek world for the first time. The second section focuses on the interventions at the Acropolis after its declaration as the first archaeological site of the newly established Greek state and throughout the 19th century.

The third section deals with the restoration work by Greek architect Nikolaos Balanos which



‘From Castle to Monument: Metamorphoses of the Acropolis from the 19th to the 21st Century’ by Fani Mallouchou-Tufano.

was extremely important because it completed the process of forming the established image of the Acropolis as the symbol of Western civilization, but his misguided and invasive restoration

methods led inevitably to the major restoration efforts that began in the last quarter of the 20th century. The fourth section of the book highlights the few interventions that established the image of the Acropolis in the immediate post-war period, while the last section focuses on the modern restoration of the Acropolis.

A professor at the Technical University of Crete and an expert in the restoration of historic monuments, Fani Mallouchou-Tufano has served as the alternate president of the Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments (ESMA) since 2016 and is the Vice President of the Society of Friends of the Acropolis which published her book.

In an interview with Kathimerini in January, she noted that “the idea for the book was sparked by the controversy which erupted three years ago over the installation of wheelchair ramps and pathways on the [Acropolis] site.”

“Even international media took a position on the issue at the time, denouncing the ‘concreting’ of the monument, because reinforced concrete was used to make the paths,” Mallouchou-Tufano told Kathimerini. “The Ministry of Culture argued that concrete wheelchair paths have existed on the site for the past 20 years, but had been damaged over time by heavy use. It also argued that

## OUR WEEKLY BOTANIST

Evropi-Sofia Dalampira

## ‘Zochia’ - Wild Greens for a Healthy Diet

Common sowthistles – ‘zochia’ – are fantastic greens for this season in Greece! Whenever I see them in the countryside, I remember my grandmother, Evropi, gathering them, boiling them for salad, and sometimes putting them in a pie!

*Sonchus oleraceus* (Common sowthistle) belongs to the family that includes botanicals such as sunflowers, dandelions, and similar plants. It can be consumed raw, but boiling somewhat reduces its bitterness, which otherwise is wonderful for your body!

It is rich in antioxidants and dietary fibers, minerals, and trace elements. However, the ‘hidden ace’ of sowthistles is the phenolics and flavonoids. These are the components that have been known since antiquity, especially through the botanist Theophrastus, for their properties. Traditionally, bitter greens strengthen the liver, the urinary tract, and act as a digestive aid and antispasmodic.

Nutritionally, sowthistles or ‘zochia’ (the local name depends on the region of Greece) are rich in calcium, vitamin C, phosphorus, iron, vitamin A, niacin, and riboflavin. They are an ideal food with a little lemon and olive oil to make a complete meal.

*\* The above is not medical advice but mere suggestions for improving your diet. Before reach herbal use you should consult your doctor, especially those who have health issues, are pregnant or are under the age of 6.*

Evropi-Sofia Dalampira holds a PhD in Agricultural Economics, MSc in Botany-Biology and MSc in Horticulture & Viticulture.



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## GUEST CONTRIBUTOR | Lisa Radinovsky

## Expert Says Extra Virgin Olive Oil Can Help Stop Alzheimer’s Disease

At the Cretan Lifestyle Conference in Rethymno, Crete in November, Dr. Magda Tsolaki, MD, PhD shared several types of evidence from a clinical trial to support her claim that extra virgin olive oil is “more promising than any drug being studied or any drug which already has been approved” for prevention of Alzheimer’s disease, as well as being safe and ready to use.

Unlike medications being studied in clinical trials, extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) has been available and safely used for thousands of years. Unlike medications that have recently been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Tsolaki pointed out, EVOO has no serious side effects, and patients with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI, which precedes full-blown Alzheimer’s) had improvement. So why isn’t extra virgin olive oil being used to help prevent Alzheimer’s?

There has not been enough evidence that it can do so. However, Tsolaki, a neuropsychiatrist who is the Chair of the Panhellenic Alzheimer Federation, Professor Emeritus of Neurology, and Coordinator of the Laboratory of Neurodegenerative Diseases at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, has spent ten years gathering such evidence, and EVOO’s time as an Alzheimer’s preventative may be coming.

Larger clinical trials are needed to ensure that early clinical results can be reproduced, but Tsolaki believes EVOO is now patients’ best choice for preventing – and even slowing down – a disease that still has no cure. (Patients should, however, always consult their doctors before making any changes to their treatments; this article must not be considered medical advice.)

As Tsolaki explained, there are not any medications on the market that appear to help prevent Alzheimer’s disease more than EVOO does. In small clinical studies, she has seen cognitive improvement after one year with olive oil, but Tsolaki reported that in its clinical trials Lecanemab (a drug approved by the FDA for early Alzheimer’s treatment) only succeeded in delaying the progression of the disease, not in making any improvement.

Lecanemab may also have potentially serious side effects: it has been associated with edema (fluid formation) and hemorrhage (bleeding) in



the brain. There may be a greater risk of these side effects in certain patients, and the drug is not expected to help others. Tsolaki reported that this makes it inappropriate for the majority of Alzheimer’s patients who are carriers of the APOE ε4 gene that indicates elevated risk of the disease (about 65%) to use Lecanemab. On the other hand, she added, “with olive oil you only have a tasty food to eat. You may gain weight if you eat too much, but only 3 spoons or 50 ml/day of moderately high phenolic EVOO with a health claim is enough.”

To support her claims, Tsolaki presented a talk titled ‘Evidence for Olive Oil Supplementation as a Dementia Prevention Strategy’ at the Cretan Lifestyle Conference. She started by discussing a recent review article that describes medications now being studied for their ability to combat seven different ‘mechanisms’ of Alzheimer’s disease (AD), or reasons why the symptoms occur (such as inflammation and oxidative stress).

While several of the drugs she mentioned offer some hope, many studies of them have not yet

shown results, “so that we will have to wait a long time for an answer about their effectiveness,” as Tsolaki explained. For this reason, and because Alzheimer drugs can have very serious side effects, EVOO may offer a better immediate solution for patients with Mild Cognitive Impairment who need help now.

In her presentation, Tsolaki pointed out that the FDA-approved drug “Lecanemab significantly slowed disease progression” from 6 months to 18 months, while reporting that the MICOIL clinical trial of EVOO showed actual improvement in three scales (not only slowing down disease progression), without any side effects after one year.

As explained in detail in eight scientific articles in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease, as well as Experimental Gerontology, and also GSC Advanced Research and Reviews in 2020 and 2021, the MICOIL study provided many different types of evidence (in both clinical and laboratory results) that EVOO containing moderate to high amounts of natural phenolic compounds helped patients with MCI remain at or even return to a better, more normal cognitive state, while a control group progressed toward Alzheimer’s over 12 months. The MICOIL researchers were considering the stage of MCI, but Tsolaki hypothesizes that if someone has entered dementia, EVOO is likely to slow down its progression.

As she explained in her presentation, Tsolaki’s research team believes there are many reasons that EVOO has this positive effect on the brain; the easiest for nonscientists to understand is the established link between Alzheimer’s and chronic inflammation, on the one hand, and the well-known anti-inflammatory effects of the olive oil components oleuropein and hydroxytyrosol, on the other. Extra virgin olive oil’s neuroprotective, anti-coagulant, and anti-oxidant properties also contribute to its ability to fight off Alzheimer’s. As one of Tsolaki’s articles indicates, with regular use EVOO also offers anti-atherosclerotic, anti-cancer, and anti-microbial properties.

Since larger clinical trials are necessary to provide stronger proof that EVOO can help Alzheimer’s patients, Tsolaki and her team continued their research with a new clinical trial. In the new trial,

this was the only way for thousands of visitors with mobility problems to reach the monuments. Even UNESCO was notified and Culture Minister Lina Mendoni suggested that it send a delegation to check the monuments firsthand. We, the members of ESMA and the Acropolis Restoration Service, showed the three-member UNESCO committee all of the different phases of the work that was carried out on the Acropolis. The briefing actually began with a lecture by me and a Power-Point presentation on what the Greek state has done to the monuments since 1834. Even these high-ranking members of UNESCO knew nothing about the modern history of the Acropolis.”

The fascinating history unfolds in the pages of the book, showcasing how and what the beloved monument has endured through the years as it continues to draw visitors from around the world.

The book is dedicated to the memory of Evi Touloupa, the renowned Greek archaeologist and Curator of Antiquities of the Acropolis, who passed away at the age of 97 on October 10, 2021.

The book is available in Greek and in English.

More information is available on the Society of Friends of the Acropolis website: <https://acropolisfriends.gr>.

100 patients with MCI regularly consumed high phenolic early harvest EVOO while following the Mediterranean diet, and another 100 patients simply followed the Mediterranean diet, using small amounts of olive oil purchased from the supermarket. The goal was to examine whether high phenolic extra virgin olive oil can stop all the processes that lead to Alzheimer’s, including the underlying causes (or ‘pathogenetic mechanisms’) that have been discovered recently, to prevent the disease. A statistical analysis of the results is now underway; a report will be submitted to the New England Journal of Medicine (JAMA) in the near future.

Tsolaki concluded her presentation by suggesting that the best treatment for Alzheimer’s may be a ‘cocktail’ of natural products such as extra virgin olive oil and a combination of exercise, positive thinking, a comfortable environment, and a reduction in vascular risk factors (which include smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity). She quoted Hippocrates, the ancient Greek ‘father of medicine’, who said 25 centuries ago, “preventing is better than treating” and “let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

Tsolaki believes “olive oil is a medicine, not a food” – an anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant, neuroprotective, and anti-coagulant medicine. Of course, olive oil has not yet been approved as a medicine to treat any disease, and scientists do not recommend that anyone discontinue treatment recommended by their doctor, but extra virgin olive oil does already have official health claims according to the European Food Safety Authority and the U.S. FDA, and there is evidence that it helps to prevent or cure numerous diseases.

Companies and organizations interested in offering donations that could help support research on EVOO’s health benefits for Alzheimer’s patients are invited to email Tsolaki: [tsolakim1@gmail.com](mailto:tsolakim1@gmail.com). Additional funding will be required for larger studies. The results are expected to have far-reaching benefits for millions of people worldwide.

Originally published on [greeklanguagegold.com](http://greeklanguagegold.com). See that site for recipes with olive oil, photos from Greece, agrotourism and food tourism suggestions, and olive oil news and information.