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# The Mediterranean Diet: A Guide to Healthy Eating

The Mediterranean diet is a way of eating that is followed by countries around the Mediterranean Sea, such as Italy, Spain, Greece, France and Morocco. While the Mediterranean diet can be different from place to place, these foods are often included:

- | vegetables and fruit
- | whole grains
- | legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils)
- | nuts and seeds and olives
- | fish and poultry eaten in moderate amounts
- | small amounts of red meat
- | olive oil, as the main source of fat
- | moderate consumption of wine, mainly with meals.

The Mediterranean diet focuses on a healthy lifestyle or pattern, which includes:

- | being active
- | getting enough rest
- | sharing meals with family and friends.

## Health Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet

Following a Mediterranean diet has many health benefits and may help to:

- | reduce your risk of developing heart disease
- | lower blood cholesterol levels
- | lower blood pressure
- | improve blood glucose (sugar) control for individuals with type 2 diabetes.

Early research shows the Mediterranean diet may prevent or improve some of the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, Alzheimer's, dementia, and glaucoma. It may also help maintain brain health.

Use the tips below as a guide to make the Mediterranean diet a healthy part of your everyday eating.



## Steps you can take

Choose plant-based foods most often.

Eat a variety of raw and cooked plant-based foods. They are rich in fibre, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals.

- | Include whole grains and fruit at each meal.
  - | Choose whole grains such as brown rice, barley, oats and quinoa.
  - | Include whole grain couscous, wheat and rye bread and products made with whole grain flour.
  - | Eat a variety of fruits such as berries, apples, pears, melon, plums, peaches and bananas.
- | Eat vegetables at lunch and dinner every day.
  - | Choose a variety of colours and types of vegetables such as tomatoes, spinach, peppers, zucchini and eggplant.
  - | Eat three or less servings per week of potatoes. Avoid potatoes that are fried.
  - | Cook vegetables in a variety of ways. Roast, sauté, steam and add them to soups.
  - | Eat at least one serving of raw vegetables each day, such as green leafy salads or cut-up vegetables like carrot sticks and cucumber slices.
- | Eat olives, unsalted nuts and seeds every day.
  - | Sprinkle a handful of unsalted almonds, walnuts or sunflower seeds onto salads.
  - | Add diced olives to salads, stews or sandwiches.



- | Snack on unsalted nuts.
- | Eat legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils) at least twice a week.
  - | Prepare broth-based soups and salads with brown or green lentils, chickpeas, black or kidney beans.
  - | Dip vegetables or bread into hummus, white or black bean dip.

Drink plenty of fluids.

- | Aim for 1.5 to 2.0 L (6 to 8 cups) of fluid every day. Ways to do this include:
  - | Drink regular tea, herbal tea or coffee without sugar.
  - | Have broth (low fat and low sodium).
  - | Put a jug of tap water on the table during each meal as a reminder to drink.
  - | Keep a glass of water at your desk or have a water bottle close by.

Use olive oil to cook and add flavour to foods.

- | Aim for at least 15 mL (1 Tbsp) of olive oil each day.
  - | Extra virgin olive oil has more antioxidants than other types of olive oil and is the most flavourful.
  - | Use olive oil when you sauté, grill, roast, pan-fry, stir-fry and bake.
  - | Drizzle olive oil on vegetables, salads, bread, toast and other dishes.



Flavour food with spices, herbs, garlic and onions instead of salt.

- | Flavour foods with herbs such as rosemary, oregano, parsley, basil and mint.
- | Mix spices like paprika, black pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg into dishes that need extra flavour.
- | Top soups, stews and other dishes with chopped or minced garlic and onion.



Include low fat milk and alternatives daily.

- | Choose two servings of low fat milk (skim, 1%, 2%), lower fat

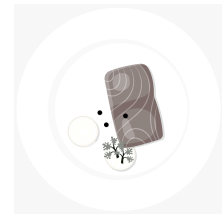
cheese (20% milk fat or less) and low fat fermented dairy foods such as kefir and yogurt (0%, 1%, 2%).

Eat at least two servings of fish and seafood (75 g (2 ½ oz)) each week.

- | Include a variety of fish such as salmon, sardines, cod, anchovies and canned tuna.
- | Choose a variety of seafood such as scallops, shrimp, mussels and clams.

Include up to two to four eggs every week.

- | Prepare omelets, scrambled or boiled eggs.
- | Use eggs in baking or cooking or adding to salads and casseroles.



Choose red meat and processed meat less often.

- | Include no more than two servings (75 g (2 ½ oz)) of red meat each week. Examples of red meat include goat, beef, pork and lamb.
- | Limit processed meat to a maximum of one serving each week. Examples of processed meat are hot dogs, sausages, deli meats, salami and bacon.
- | Replace red and processed meat with lean white meat, legumes (dried peas and lentils), eggs, fish or seafood.

Choose lean white meat at least 2 times a week.

- | Include lean white meat such as chicken, turkey or rabbit.

If you drink wine, limit to moderate amounts with meals.

- | This means about one glass per day for women and two glasses per day for men. One serving of wine is:
  - | 142 mL (5 oz) glass of 12% wine.
- | You do not have to drink alcohol to follow a Mediterranean diet.

Limit sweets.

- | Limit sweets such as candies, pastries, desserts and sweetened pop or sweetened juice to two servings per week or less, or save them for special occasions.

Enjoy a Mediterranean lifestyle.

- | Make time to cook and prepare meals.
- | Whenever possible, enjoy cooking and sharing mealtime together with friends and family.
- | Include three meals a day.
- | Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- | Get enough rest.

Replace foods from the typical North American diet with foods from the Mediterranean diet:

<i>Typical North American Diet</i>	<i>Mediterranean Diet</i>
Juice, fruit drinks, pop, specialty coffee and tea with sugar	Water, herbal tea (without sugar)
Cream soup	Broth or clear soup
Vegetable oil, butter, margarine	Olive oil or olive oil margarine
Potatoes, white bread, pasta and rice	Whole grain bread, pasta, rice, whole wheat couscous
Salted, spiced, flavoured nuts and seeds	Unsalted nuts and seeds
Higher fat milk, cream, ice cream, cheese and yogurt	Low fat yogurt and cheese
Red meat (including lamb, goat and pork), processed meats (sausages, luncheon meats, bacon)	Fish, seafood, poultry (including chicken and turkey) and rabbit
Canned beans in sauce, refried beans	Legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils)
Salt	Herbs, spices, onions and garlic
Frozen meals, delivery meals or takeout	Meals prepared at home from scratch

Snack foods such as chips, candy, or baked goods (e.g. cakes, pastries and cookies)	Snacks such as fresh fruit, unsalted nuts and seeds, hummus and pita
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See " [The Mediterranean diet pyramid: A lifestyle for today](#)" (2010).



## Additional Resources

- 1 Spice Up Your Meals Without Salt! <http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=J8XuWgU=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- 1 Food Sources of Omega-3 <http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMHpUQE=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- 1 Mediterranean Diet Sample Menus <http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=J8DmUQM=&PreviewHandout=bA==>

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## Notes

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