
The Mediterranean Diet: A Guide to Healthy Eating

The Mediterranean diet is a way of eating that is followed in countries around the Mediterranean Sea, such as Italy, Spain, Greece, France and Morocco.

While the Mediterranean diet can be different from place to place, all the diets are high in plant foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds, olive oil and legumes (beans, peas and lentils). Fish, seafood, eggs and low fat milk and milk products are eaten in moderate amounts along with red wine with meals. Meat and meat products and sweet foods are eaten occasionally.

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

- regular physical activity (at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) of activity per week, at least 10 minutes or more at a time)
- getting enough rest
- planning time to prepare and cook food
- sharing meals with family and friends when possible.

Health Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet

Following a Mediterranean-style diet may help to:

- reduce your risk of developing heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes
- improve blood glucose (sugar) control for individuals with type 2 diabetes
- delay development of cognitive disorders such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease.



Steps you can take

The steps below provide tips for following a Mediterranean-style of eating.

1. Choose plant foods every day.

Plant foods are rich in fibre, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals.

- Include a variety of minimally processed whole grains every day.
 - Choose whole grains such as brown rice, barley, oats, couscous, quinoa and whole grain breads and cereals including wheat, rice, corn, oats, rye, barley and millet.
- Include vegetables at most meals and snacks.
- Choose a variety of colours and types of vegetables. All vegetables can fit, such as tomatoes, spinach, peppers, zucchini, carrots, chard and eggplant.
- Cook vegetables in a variety of ways. Roast, sauté, steam and add them to soups. Avoid deep fried potatoes and other vegetables.
- 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.
- Include a variety of fruits at meals and snacks.
 - All fruits can fit, such as berries, apples, pears, melon, plums, peaches and bananas.
- Eat unsalted nuts and seeds every day.
 - Sprinkle a handful of unsalted almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts or sunflower seeds onto cereals and salads.
 - Add nuts and seeds to baking.
 - Snack on unsalted nuts, or make trail mix with nuts, seeds and dried fruit such as raisins.
- Eat legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils) at least a couple times 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.

2. Drink plenty of fluids.

- Aim for 1.5 to 2.0 L (6 to 8 cups) of fluid every day. You can include regular tea, herbal tea or coffee without sugar, honey, syrup or nectar.
- Put a jug of tap water on the table during each meal as a reminder to drink.
- Keep a glass of water or water bottle near, at work or school.

3. Use olive oil to cook and add flavour to foods.

- Aim for at least 15 mL (1 Tbsp) of olive oil each day.
- Use olive oil when you sauté, grill, roast, pan-fry and bake.
- Drizzle olive oil on vegetables, salads, bread, toast and other dishes.

4. 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. Check recipes for ideas for spices and herbs that go together.
- Top soups, stews and other dishes with chopped or minced garlic, onion or herbs.

5. Choose low fat milk and alternatives.

- Examples include 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%).

6. Eat at least two servings of fish and seafood each week if you eat fish.

- 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.

7. Limit red meat.

- Limit red meat such as goat, beef, pork and lamb to 2 or less servings a week.

- Replace red and processed meat with lean white meat (chicken, turkey or rabbit), legumes, eggs, tofu, fish or seafood.
- Avoid or limit processed meat to a maximum of one serving each week. Examples of processed meat are hot dogs, sausages, deli meats, salami and bacon.

8. Limit sweets and desserts.

- Limit sweets such as candies, sugar, honey, jam, pastries, desserts and ice cream to a couple times a week or less, or save them for special occasions.
- Replace sweetened pop and juice with water.

9. If you drink alcohol, limit to moderate amounts with meals.

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

The table below shows you how you can replace common foods with Mediterranean food items.

Foods	Replace with Mediterranean Diet Food Items
Juice, fruit drinks, pop, specialty coffee and tea with sugar, honey or syrup	Water, coffee and tea (without sugar)
Cream soup	Broth or clear soups
Vegetable oil, butter, margarine	Olive oil
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,	Low fat yogurt and cheese

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Red meat (including lamb, goat and pork), processed meats (sausages, luncheon meats, bacon)	Fish, seafood, poultry (including chicken and turkey) rabbit, tofu, legumes, nuts and seeds
Canned beans in sauce, refried beans	Legumes (dried beans, peas and lentils), plain canned beans such as kidney beans, black beans or chick peas
Salt	Herbs, spices, onions and garlic
Delivery meals or takeout, processed and packaged commercial frozen meals	Meals prepared at home from scratch
Chips, candy, or baked goods such as cakes, pastries and cookies	Fruit, unsalted nuts and seeds, hummus and whole grain bread or crackers

See "The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid: A Lifestyle for Today" (2010).
http://dietamediterranea.com/piramidedm/piramide_INGLES.pdf



Additional Resources

- Food Sources of Omega-3 <http://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMHpUQE=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- Mediterranean Diet Sample Menus (1500 kcal)
<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=J8DmXgI=&PreviewHandout=bA==>
- Mediterranean Diet Sample Menus (2000 kcal)
<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=J8PuXgE=&PreviewHandout=bA==>

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Notes

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