

IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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The Mediterranean Diet

What is the Mediterranean diet?

The Mediterranean Diet is a way of eating based on the traditional foods and drinks of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, more specifically Greece, Southern Italy, and Spain. The Mediterranean Diet is not a diet, as in “go on a diet,” but it could improve your health. It has been shown to lower the risk of heart disease and early death.

The principal aspects of this diet include proportionally high consumption of olive oil, legumes, unrefined cereals, fruits, and vegetables, moderate to high consumption of fish, moderate consumption of dairy products (mostly cheese and yogurt), moderate wine consumption, and a low consumption of non-fish meat products.

Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet

Research has shown that this diet lowers the risk of heart disease and has also been associated with lower levels of LDL cholesterol or the “bad” cholesterol.

Olive oil may be the main health-promoting component of the diet. Regular consumption of olive oil may lower risk of early mortality, cancer, cardiovascular disease, neurodegeneration such as Alzheimer’s disease, and several chronic diseases.

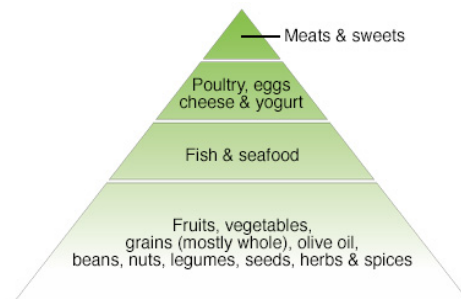


Key components of the diet

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes:

- Eat primarily plant-based foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts
- Replace butter with healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil

- Use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods
- Limit red meat to no more than a few times a month
- Eat fish and poultry at least 2 times a week
- Enjoy meals with family and friends
- Drink red wine in moderation (optional)
- Get plenty of exercise



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Healthy Fats

The focus of this diet isn’t on limiting total fat consumption, but to make better choices about the types of fat you eat. The diet encourages olive oil as the primary source of fat. Olive oil is a type of fat that can help reduce LDL cholesterol levels when used in place of saturated or trans fats such as butter or margarine. Extra-virgin and virgin olive oils are the least processed forms and contain the highest levels of antioxidants. Fish is eaten on a regular basis in this diet. Fatty fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon are rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Fruits, Veggies, Nuts and Grains

Residents of Greece eat very little red meat and average about 9 servings a day of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Grains in the Mediterranean region are typically whole grain and usually contain very few unhealthy trans fats, and bread is an important part of the

diet. However, throughout the Mediterranean region, bread is eaten plain or dipped in olive oil, not eaten with butter or margarines, which contain saturated or trans fats.

Nuts are another part of a healthy Mediterranean diet. Nuts are high in fat but most of the fat is not saturated fat. Because nuts are high in calories, they should not be eaten in large amounts, generally no more than a handful a day. Avoid candied or honey-roasted and heavily salted nuts.

Wine

The health effects of alcohol have been debated for many years, and some doctors are reluctant to encourage alcohol consumption because of the negative health consequences of excessive drinking. However, wine in moderation has been associated with a reduced risk of heart disease in some research studies. Moderation means no more than 5 ounces (or one glass) of wine daily for women and no more than 10 ounces (2 glasses) of wine daily for men under age 65. Also, red grape juice can offer many of the same health benefits without the alcohol.

If you're unable to limit your alcohol intake to the amounts defined above, if you have a personal or family history of alcohol abuse, or if you have heart or liver disease, refrain from drinking wine or any other alcohol.

Homemade Hummus Recipe

Ingredients

- 4 garlic cloves
- 2 cups canned chickpeas, drained, liquid reserved
- 1 ½ teaspoon of kosher salt
- 1/3 cup of tahini (sesame paste)
- 6 tablespoons of freshly squeezed lemon juice (2 lemons)
- 2 tablespoons water or liquid from chickpeas
- 8 dashes of hot sauce



Directions

Turn on the food processor fitted with the steel blade and drop the garlic down the feed tube; process until it's minced. Add the rest of the ingredients to the food processor and process until the hummus is coarsely pureed. Taste for seasoning, and serve chilled or at room temperature.

Eat with warm pita bread or vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, celery, or cucumbers.

Sources:

- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801?pg=2>
- <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/ina-garten/hummus-recipe.html?oc=linkback>

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