

# Benefits of the Mediterranean Diet

A Mediterranean-style diet is inspired by countries around the Mediterranean Sea. It is a healthy way of eating, not a specific diet to lose weight. It primarily consists of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, olive oil, lean protein, seafood and low-fat dairy. It focuses on making fresh food that is full of flavor. The plan can be adjusted to your individual needs and preferences. Many studies over time have shown health benefits of eating this way.

The Mediterranean lifestyle involves regular physical activity, sharing meals with other people and enjoying life.

## Health benefits of a Mediterranean diet

This diet is high in fiber and consists of lean protein and healthy oils. It's low in saturated fats and sugar. The diet has been shown to prevent or help manage:

- Depression
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Parkinson's disease
- Alzheimer's disease
- Cancers of the colon, prostate and breast
- Strokes
- Heart attacks
- Premature death

## What do I eat on a Mediterranean diet?

A variety of whole, single-ingredient foods is the key to good health.

## Foods to include daily

### • Vegetables

Examples include leafy greens, tomatoes, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, zucchini, broccoli, cauliflower, peppers, cucumbers, green beans, eggplant and sweet potatoes. Fresh, frozen or canned (no salt added or rinsed thoroughly in a colander) vegetables are acceptable.

### • Fruits

Examples include apples, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, oranges, pears and peaches.

### • Whole grains

Examples include wild rice, brown rice, whole steel-cut oats, quinoa, rye and barley.



- Beans and legumes

Examples include lentils, chickpeas and beans such as pinto, fava, kidney and black beans.

- **Nuts and seeds**

Examples include peanuts, walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, cashews, pumpkin seeds and pecans.

- **Olive oil, herbs and spices**

Season food with salt-free items like garlic, oregano, pepper, basil, cinnamon and cumin.

## **Foods to eat throughout the week, in moderation**

- **Fish and seafood**

Examples include salmon, trout, mackerel, haddock, tuna, sardines, anchovies and whitefish. It also includes shellfish such as shrimp, oysters, mussels and clams.

- **Lean protein**

Examples include skinless poultry, eggs (limit egg yolks to 4 to 5 per week) and plant-based protein such as soy and tofu.

- **Low-fat dairy**

Examples include low-fat cottage cheese, Greek yogurt, low-fat milk, low-fat cheese and kefir.

## **Occasional treats**

Limit these foods:

- Red meat such as beef, lamb and pork
- Refined grains such as white rice and food made with white flour
- Sugary treats such as chocolate, candy or pastries

## **Pack in the flavor**

You can give fresh food loads of flavor by trying these sauces, dips and seasonings:

- Hummus
- Salsa
- Vinaigrette dressing
- Herbs and spices



## **Drink smart**

- Water should be your main source of hydration. It can be flavored with items like lemon or cucumber. Sparkling water is also acceptable.
- Coffee and tea without sugar and in moderation are acceptable, but avoid sugar-sweetened beverages.
- You can enjoy an optional glass of wine.

## **Tips for eating out**

- Skip fried foods as they contain a lot of saturated fat.
- Look for fish entrees that are cooked without cream or butter.
- Pick salads that have nuts and seeds.
- Choose vegetarian options that don't have too much cheese.
- Choose low-fat cooking methods like grilled, steamed, baked and roasted.

## **Be active and socialize**

- Exercise at least 150 minutes a week.
- Take time to enjoy meals with your family and friends.

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