

## **Mediterranean Diet: Your Voyage to Good Health**

In today's lexicon, "diet" generally means "weight loss diet," but the dictionary lists the primary definition of diet as "the usual intake of food and drink." Make your usual diet a healthy one, and you will never need to diet again.

### **The benefits**

Research has shown that the traditional Mediterranean-style diet reduces the risk of heart disease, overall mortality, cardiovascular mortality, cancer and cancer mortality, and the incidence of Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease.

### **A plant-based diet**

A Mediterranean-style diet describes a plant-based diet, with about 15% of calories from protein and approximately 30%–35% of calories from healthy monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fat. The remainder of calories comes from unprocessed, fiber-rich foods, including fruits and vegetables of all kinds, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Fish is commonly eaten, especially omega-3 fatty acid-rich fish. All meats are grilled, broiled, or sautéed and usually are not deep-fried. Red meat is saved for special occasions and in small portions, and a glass of wine with meals is traditional. Olive oil is used instead of margarine or shortening. Butter is not banned, but adding fat to bread is not usual behaviour. Finally, the diet includes small amounts of dairy, often whole cow's milk and goat's milk, and limited eggs and wine.

### **Portion size**

Eating a Mediterranean-style diet, while maintaining a healthy weight, can reduce the risk for many medical conditions. However, people should pay attention to portion size, because calories count—even "good" calories. The traditional Mediterranean diet plan includes foods naturally high in fat, such as olives, olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds. This is why portion size is important in order to prevent weight gain. For example, olive oil, with its favorable ratio of "good" monounsaturated fat to "bad" unsaturated fat, is certainly heart-healthy, but will not, in itself, prevent disease. As such, too much wine can prove counterproductive.

## Diet recommendations

A Mediterranean-style diet follows the following type of eating pattern. Many variations exist.

### Daily

- Vegetables and fruits as desired:
  - Starchy vegetables, such as turnips and potatoes
  - Usually fresh fruit for dessert
- Whole grains:
  - Breads
  - Cereals
  - Pasta
  - Rice
- Legumes:
  - Dried beans
  - Lentils
  - Chickpeas
- Nuts and nut butters
- Seeds
- Cheese and yogurt:
  - 1–2 cups daily, including goat’s milk cheese and yogurt
- Olive oil in cooking and as salad dressing

### Weekly

- Fish, several times weekly, especially omega-3 fatty acid-rich fish, such as:
  - Salmon
  - Sardines
  - Mackerel
- Skinless poultry
- Eggs
  - Up to four yolks weekly, including eggs used in cooking

### Infrequently

- Red meat:
  - Lean sirloin cuts, occasionally (biweekly)
- Sweets for special occasions
- Deep-fried foods

### **Optional**

- Wine:
  - Preferably red wine, in moderation
  - Not while pregnant or if against doctor’s advice

Enjoy a Mediterranean lifestyle—enjoy delicious meals with friends and relatives, stay active, do not smoke, and try to reduce stress. These are all important heart-healthy aspects of the Mediterranean diet.