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Mediterranean Diet Guidelines

The Mediterranean Diet is one of the most scientifically researched, recognised and recommended diets worldwide for health and longevity. The Mediterranean Diet is rich in vegetables, fruit, peas and beans (legumes) and wholegrains. It also contains moderate amounts of chicken and fish, with some red meat and most fat is unsaturated coming from olive oil and nuts. Adding a small amount of red wine has also been shown to increase health benefits. The Mediterranean Diet is not about a quick fix, and it is not a strict list of what you should not eat. Rather, the Mediterranean Diet is a formula for healthy day-to-day eating over the long term.

In combination with moderate exercise and not smoking, the Mediterranean Diet offers an affordable, balanced and health-promoting lifestyle choice. Using a wide range of fruits and vegetables gives the body maximum access to sources of vitamins, minerals and other trace nutrients.

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Mediterranean Diet Guidelines

Scientific research has conclusively shown that following a Mediterranean diet can reduce the chance of developing conditions such as:

- Heart Disease
- Type 2 Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Metabolic syndrome and its associated cardiovascular risk
- Obesity
- Some Cancers (eg; bowel and breast)
- Parkinson's Disease
- Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia. A strong mental benefit, equal to up to 10 years of delayed cognitive ageing. (For those who developed cognitive impairment, staying strictly on the Mediterranean diet helped reduce progression to Alzheimer's disease by 48% compared with the group of people who did not follow the diet.)
- Premature death (among individuals aged 70-90 years, adherence to a Mediterranean diet and healthful lifestyle is associated with a more than 50% lower rate of all-cause-specific mortality).

- Maximise intake of vegetables, peas, beans (legumes), fruits and wholegrains.
- Limited red meat intake - fish is a healthier substitute.
- Use mono-unsaturated olive oil to replace of animal fat such as butter or lard.
- Cold pressed extra virgin olive oil is best.
- Limit intake of processed foods and ready to eat meals, which may be high in salt and saturated fat.
- Do not add salt to your food at the table, replace the excess salt with herbs and garlic.
- Drink (red) wine during meals but no more than two small glasses per day and have at least 2 alcohol free days per week.
- Water is the best 'non alcoholic beverage' (as opposed to sugary drinks), although health benefits are also seen with tea and coffee. Soda water with a fresh citrus slice is a good alternative to soft drink.

Serving Size Guidelines

Vegetables: 6 servings per day e.g. a cup of raw leafy vegetables or half a cup of other vegetables.

Fruit: 3 servings per day e.g. one apple, banana, one orange, 200 g of melon or watermelon, 30 g of grapes. Berries are one of the better choices as they are lowest in sugar. Please aim for 1 serve of berries per day as these are also very good for your microbiome.

Grains/bread/rice/pasta: Up to 3 servings per day. E.g. a cup of cooked spelt pasta or brown rice; one slice of rye, spelt or gluten free bread.

Dairy: 2 servings per day. Limit cows milk and aim for yoghurt or 30 g of cheese. Best to use plant milks i.e. almond milk.

Olive Oil: Daily as the main added fat.

Potatoes: 3 servings per week 100g.

Legumes: 3-4 servings per week. E.g. one cup (100 g) of cooked dry beans. Lentils, chick beans, black beans, turtle beans, edamame beans, tofu, tempeh, red kidney beans, borlotti beans, cannellini beans etc. Pulse pasta is another way to incorporate legumes into the diet. Buy pulse pasta from the pasta aisle in the supermarket.

Nuts: 3-4 servings per week. 30 g. Eat as a snack or sprinkle on food for added taste.

Eggs: 3 servings per week. 1-2 eggs = 1 serve

Fish: 5-6 servings per week..

Red Meat: 4 servings per month.





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Mediterranean Diet Ingredients

Vegetables and Fruits

The World Health Organization (WHO) - and the UK Government's Change4Life campaign – it recommends we eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. This guidance is partly based on research into the Mediterranean Diet. Other governments recommend higher levels of fruit and vegetables, such as seven or even ten portions daily. Tinned, dried, and frozen fruit or vegetables are also valuable in the diet, although fresh is preferable.

Cereals

Cereals should be wholegrain and wheat-free where possible. Examples are spelt, rye, barley, oats, millet, corn and rice. They are found in cereal flakes, pasta, bread and crackers. They provide carbohydrates, protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They help to reduce bowel problems, including cancers; they help to lower cholesterol, which can reduce the risk of heart disease

Fish

Various types of fish are important in the Mediterranean Diet. White fish such as cod, plaice, haddock, hake and halibut are a good source of protein. Shellfish such as prawns, crab, lobster and mussels contain protein and some trace minerals. Oily fish also contains omega-3 fatty acids and vitamins A and D. Omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers and dementia; they are also thought to be helpful for brain development and in the treatment of depression.

Note: Some oily fish contain low levels of toxic heavy metals. Limit intake of tuna (tinned is fine as they use small tuna), shark and swordfish.

Legumes

These are vegetables that grow in pods. They include peas, beans, lentils, chickpeas and peanuts. They form quite an important part of the Mediterranean Diet and are a useful base for soups and stews, as well as being found in hummus and eaten on their own - for example, as baked beans. They provide protein, carbohydrate, fibre and vitamins. They are associated with a reduced risk of heart disease.

Fats and oils

When cooking Mediterranean-style meals, mono-unsaturated oils are used to replace saturated animal fats, such as butter and lard. Olive oil is the traditional oil used in the Mediterranean region. Healthier mono-unsaturated oils are also found in olives, nuts, seeds and avocados. Vegetables can be roasted with small amounts of olive oil. Olive oil is often used in dressings for salads. You can also dip bread into it as an alternative to using butter. Mediterranean diets can have a similar total fat content to the typical Western diet but the Mediterranean diet is high in health-protective mono-unsaturated fat. Note: consuming too much fat of any type can contribute to obesity.

Nuts and Seeds

Nuts such as almonds, chestnuts, walnuts, cashews, and Brazil nuts, and also seeds such as pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, and poppy, provide protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, as well as being high in 'good' unsaturated fats.

Note: Try to avoid salted nuts, as salt can raise blood pressure. Note: As with all high-fat foods, consuming too much can contribute to obesity.

White Meat

Lean chicken, turkey, and other poultry are high in protein, vitamins, and minerals. It is best to remove the skin and any visible fat. It is not a healthy choice when white meat is served in processed foods such as pies, burgers, and fried chicken. It is generally much higher in animal fat.

Foods to eat in smaller quantities:



Wine

Particularly red wine, is often consumed as part of a traditional Mediterranean diet. It contains antioxidants and anti-inflammatory chemicals and can help to protect against heart disease. However, alcohol in excess is not healthy and current health guidelines for men and women recommend no more than two small glasses of wine daily, preferably with a couple of alcohol-free days during the week. Wine is also quite high in calories and can therefore contribute to obesity.

Dairy Produce

Milk alternatives such as nut milks, yoghurt, cheese, butter and cream are consumed in smaller quantities in a Mediterranean diet than in a Western diet. Dairy products contain protein, vitamins A and B12 and calcium. However, some are also high in saturated fat, especially cream and butter. Choosing lower-fat cheeses such as cottage cheese, mozzarella or feta rather than cheddar or cream cheese will reduce your saturated fat intake.

Red Meat

Red meat such as beef, pork or lamb is eaten in smaller quantities in the Mediterranean Diet than in the Western diet. Meat is high in protein, vitamins and minerals (especially iron) but tends to be higher in fat (particularly saturated fat) compared with the fat content of poultry. It is not a healthy choice when red meat is served in processed foods such as pies, burgers and sausages. It is likely to be higher in fat and lower in nutritional value. Red meat can form part of a healthy diet so long as you consume it as a treat, such as Sunday dinner, or to make it into a casserole or stew with lots of vegetables. In this way, you are consuming less red meat overall plus more fibre.

Potatoes

Potatoes can be a healthy choice but this depends on the cooking method. They contain fibre, vitamins B and C, and the mineral Potassium. However, they are also high in starch which is rapidly converted to glucose. High available starch content can be associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Simpler cooking methods such as boiling, baking, or mashing (without butter) are healthier choices than chips, roast potatoes or crisps.

Note: Consuming potatoes together with other vegetables is suggested.

Sweets and Desserts

Sweet foods such as cakes, biscuits and sweets should only be eaten in small quantities as an occasional treat. They often contain high levels of saturated fat as well as being high in sugar which is a major contributor to type 2 diabetes and tooth decay.

Note: If you choose to eat dessert, try a paleo treat without refined sugars. Replace flour with almond meal and sugar with stevia or monk fruit in baking.

Increasing Exercise:

It is recommended that adults undertake at least 30 minutes of daily exercise. This could be taking walks, jogging, cycling or swimming. This helps the body to regulate weight. Our sedentary lifestyle is a major contributory factor in cardiovascular disease and cancer. Try tracking your steps on your phone or a fitbit – how close are you getting to the 10,000 steps? Try setting a alarm on your phone for every 50 mins to move your body.



Additional Guidelines:

Limb carbs at night – aim to eat meat and 3 veg at night if possible. Aim to eat your carbohydrates during the day when you are more active. Meditation – aim for at least 10 minutes prior to bed each night. Useful apps are Headspace, Insight timer, Smiling Mind.