

Mediterranean Diet

Why Is the Mediterranean Diet So Special?

This is more than a “diet.” **It’s a heart-healthy eating plan. For most people, what’s good for your heart is good for your brain — and the rest of your body too.**

When you follow this eating plan on a regular basis, you will have:

- Lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease and stroke.
- Lower risk for cancer and death from cancer.
- Lower risk for Alzheimer’s, a disease that affects the brain, and Parkinson’s, a disease that affects the nervous system.

Why read this material?






Some food can lead to long-term health problems. And other food can help you become or stay as healthy as possible. When you read this material, you’ll learn how to eat so you can help improve your health for years to come.




Talk to your health care provider about how much food and drink you need each day to help you be healthy. Ask whether the Mediterranean diet is right for you.



Quiz: How Do You Eat Now?

Before you read more about the Mediterranean way to eat, stop to think about how you eat now.

| | Add 1 point for a “Yes” answer. (One point maximum allowed.) | |
|--|---|---|
| Do you use olive oil as your main cooking fat? | |  |
| Do you use an olive-oil-based sauce 2 or more times per week ? | | |
| Do you eat 4 Tablespoons (Tbsp) or more per day of olive oil? | | |
| Do you eat 2 or more servings per day of vegetables? 1 serving is 1 cup of raw veggies or a half-cup of cooked veggies. These measurements are about the size of tennis ball. | |  |
| Do you eat 3 or more servings per day of fruit? 1 serving is 1 whole fruit, medium size or about 1 cup of fresh fruit. These measurements are about the size of tennis ball. | |  |
| Do you eat 3 or more servings per week of beans, such as kidney or black beans, or legumes, such as split peas and lentils? 1 serving is a half-cup of cooked beans. | | |
| Do you eat 4 or more servings per week of nuts? 1 serving is a quarter-cup. | |  |
| Do you eat 4 or more servings per week of fish or shellfish? 1 serving is 3 to 5 ounces of fish or 6 to 7 ounces of shellfish. | |  |
| Do you usually eat chicken or turkey (white meat, no skin)? | | |
| Total this column: | | |

| | Add 1 point for a "Yes" answer. (One point maximum allowed.) |
|---|--|
| Do you eat 1 serving or less per day of meat: hamburger, veal, lamb, venison, pork, ham, or sausage? 1 serving is 3 ounces (oz.), the size of a deck of cards. | |
| Do you eat 1 serving or less per day of butter, margarine or cream? 1 serving is 1 teaspoon (tsp). |  |
| Do you drink 1 can or less per day of carbonated cola (soda)? 1 can is 12 oz. | |
| Do you eat 3 servings or less per week of sweets or pastries, such as cake, cookies, biscuits, and custard? |  |
| Do you drink 1 glass of wine per day? 1 glass = 5 ounces for men and 3 ounces for women. <i>Do not add more points if you drink more wine than this. Do not add points for any other kind of alcohol you may drink.</i> |  |
| Total this column: | |
| Your total points: | |

What does it all mean?

There are 14 points possible on this quiz. To eat a heart-healthy diet, your goal should be 11 or more points.

Why is it called the "Mediterranean" diet?

Heart disease is less common in the countries that border the Mediterranean Sea than it is in the United States. Researchers believe that the diet people follow in Greece and southern Italy is a key to their health.

The Keys to a Heart-Healthy Diet



Know what to eat

- **Vegetables:** Eat two or more servings daily of vegetables. A serving is a cup of raw or a half-cup of cooked vegetables. At least one serving per day should be raw, not cooked, vegetables in a salad. Try to eat vegetables that are in season. If you buy frozen vegetables, look for products that are “fresh frozen.” That usually means that they were frozen soon after they came off the farm.
- **Fruit:** Eat two to three servings per day or more of fresh fruit. One serving is 1 whole fresh fruit, medium size or about 1 cup of fresh fruit. Include the juices, pulp, skin, and fiber as appropriate. Try to eat fruit that are in season. If you buy frozen fruit, look for products that are “fresh frozen.”



Fast facts

People in Greece eat an average of 9 servings a day of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Some great antioxidant-rich fruits are: prunes, raisins, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, plums, oranges, red grapes, and cherries. Antioxidant-rich vegetables include: kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, broccoli, beets, red bell peppers, onions, corn, and eggplant.

- **Fish and shellfish:** Eat three or more servings per week of fish or shellfish. One serving is 3 to 5 ounces of fish (for example, cod, tilapia, walleye, salmon, tuna, trout, whitefish, etc.) or 6 to 7 ounces of shellfish (for example, shrimp, scallop, crab, lobster, etc.). One or more of the servings should be a fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, or trout. Note: You may eat fish as often as you wish. *Many people near the Mediterranean eat fish every day.*

- **White meat:** Choose white meats, such as chicken and turkey, without the skin. One serving is 3 ounces — about the size of a deck of cards.



- **Legumes and beans:** Eat three or more servings per week of legumes or beans. One serving is a half-cup. Examples of legumes are split peas, lentils and peanuts. Examples of beans are red, green, black, lima, kidney, soy, navy, and more. Most legumes and beans are high in fiber and protein and low in fat. Note: Limit your intake of peanuts. They are high in fat.
- **Grains:** 100% whole-grain or whole wheat bread is an important part of the diet in the Mediterranean. One serving is the size of one slice of bread. Often, bread is eaten plain or dipped in olive oil. Try whole-grain cereals too. Note: Multi-grain breads are not 100% whole-grain bread.



- **Nuts and seeds:** Eat one or more servings per week of **raw, unsalted** nuts or seeds. One serving is a quarter-cup. Nuts give you a full feeling, so limit your intake to one serving per day. Eat them before a meal; avoid eating nuts or seeds at the end of the day. Three types of tree nuts are suggested as snacks — walnuts, hazelnuts and almonds. Nuts are high in fat, but most of it is unsaturated fat. That kind of fat is healthier to eat than saturated and trans fat.

- **Healthy fat, including olive oil:** The Mediterranean diet focuses on making smart choices about the types of fat you eat. Olive oil is commonly used instead of butter or margarine. It has monounsaturated fat — a type of fat that can help reduce your “bad” cholesterol levels (called *LDL cholesterol*). “Extra-virgin” and “virgin” olive oils — the least-processed forms — also provide antioxidant benefits. Canola oil is another good option.

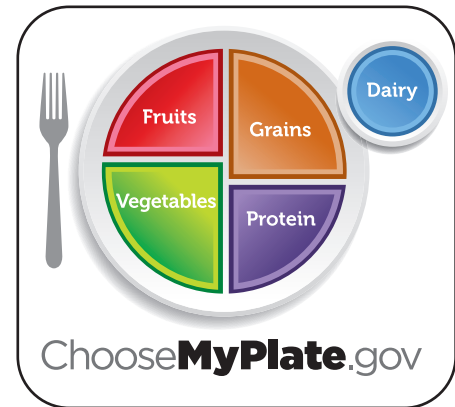
Avoid saturated fats, hydrogenated oils and partially hydrogenated oils. These are called *trans fats*. They can contribute to heart disease.

- **Other foods:** You may enjoy these foods in moderation:
 - **Eggs:** Limit 3 or 4 yolks per week.
 - **Dark chocolate:** Choose chocolate with at least 50% cocoa.



Know how much to eat

A healthy meal includes about half a plate of vegetables and fruit, a quarter-plate of 100% whole grains and a quarter plate of a lean protein. Dairy could be skim milk or reduced-fat yogurt. Limited amounts of healthy fats are included too. For more information, ask your health care provider for *Eat Well: Use the Plate Method*, Mayo Clinic form MC0592-11.



Try new ways to cook

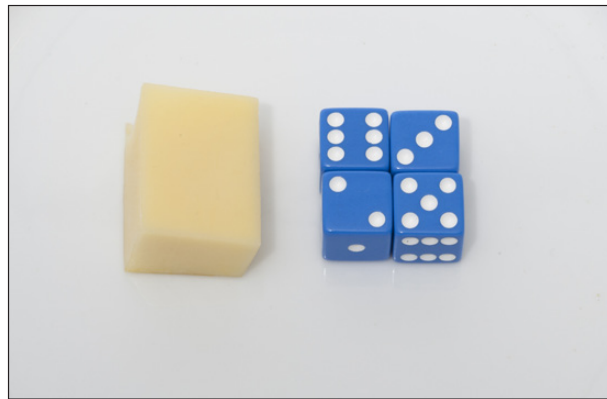
- **Use tomato sauce:** At least twice per week, cook with sauce made from tomato, garlic and onion, plus herbs to taste. Use it over vegetables, pasta, rice, or other dishes. You can make this sauce with olive oil and tiny chopped ingredients. Simmer slowly over a low heat.
- **Use extra virgin olive oil:** Use it instead of butter for low-heat cooking, such as sautéing. Do not use it for frying or other high-heat cooking methods. Choose it for salad dressing as well.
- **Use herbs and spices:** Choose these instead of salt to flavor your food. They taste great and are better for most people than salt (sodium).



Know what to avoid or eat less of

These foods typically have a lot of fat and calories.

- **Red meat and processed meats:** Limit your intake to 3 oz. (1 serving) per week of hamburgers, hot dogs, sausages, brats, pork, veal, cured ham, cold cuts, and packaged lunch meat. Be sure to remove all the fat you can see before you cook the meat.
- **High-sugar/high-fat foods:** Avoid pastries, cakes, donuts, cookies and similar treats, pudding, custard, French fries, and potato chips.
- **High-fat dairy products:** Avoid or limit your intake of whole and 2% milk, butter, margarine, and ice cream. Limit your intake of cured cheeses and fatty cheeses to one serving per week — the size of four dice. Cured cheese is aged 6 months or more. Some fatty cheeses are cheddar, cream cheese, brie, and bleu cheese.



- **Soda (pop):** Avoid sweetened (sugary) and diet carbonated drinks, especially colas. Carbonated water is OK.



Consider these topics too



- **Wine and alcohol:** The Mediterranean diet typically includes wine. However, it is an optional part of this eating plan. In moderate amounts, alcohol reduces the risk of heart disease. Drinking more than the suggested amounts may increase your risk of health problems, including certain types of cancer.

If you drink alcohol, choose wine as your primary drink. Red wine is a “more Mediterranean” choice than white wine. But white wine is OK too. **Limit your intake to one glass per day. Drink it with a meal.** In general, 5 oz. is considered one glass of wine. Studies have shown benefit for men when they drink 5 oz. of wine per day and for women when they drink 3 oz. of wine per day.

- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** Monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats, such as canola oil and some nuts, have the beneficial linolenic acid, a type of omega-3 fatty acid. Omega-3 fatty acids lower triglycerides, decrease blood clotting, are associated with decreased sudden heart attack, improve the health of your blood vessels, and help moderate blood pressure.

Fatty fish — such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, and salmon — are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Relax and enjoy eating

A big part of the Mediterranean way of life is to slow down and enjoy yourself! Sit at a table for *at least* two lunches or dinners per week. Take at least 20 minutes to enjoy those meals. And try to eat as many meals as possible with family and friends!

Get more information if you need it

If you have questions after you read this material, talk to your Mayo Clinic health care provider or to a registered dietitian. The clinic’s website, www.mayoclinic.com, also has helpful nutrition information.