



A guide to the
**Mediterranean
diet**

A comprehensive resource for patients



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Introduction:

The Mediterranean diet

First described by American physiologist Ancel Keys in the 1960s, the Mediterranean diet (MD) is a dietary pattern based on the traditional dietary and lifestyle habits of individuals living in the Mediterranean region.

Since then, variations of the diet have been adopted by individuals worldwide for its many health benefits. The MD has been associated with improvements in quality of life and longevity, as well as a reduced risk of several chronic diseases, including:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Metabolic syndrome
- Neurodegenerative diseases (e.g., Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, dementia)
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Certain cancers

The diet is composed primarily of minimally processed, nutrient-dense plant-based foods, including cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO), vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. The diet also allows for the moderate consumption of lean meats, fish, dairy, and red wine, and limits the consumption of red meat, refined and processed foods, and sugars.



The Mediterranean diet food pyramid



✂ Cut me out and stick me on the fridge!



10 guidelines for the Mediterranean diet

01

Drink 50 to 68 fl. oz. (1.5 to 2 liters) of water each day

Water is essential for maintaining hydration, as well as supporting digestion and regular elimination. If you have a hard time remembering to drink regularly, you can set reminders for yourself on your phone or use check marks on a paper calendar.

02

Consume olive oil as your primary source of fat

Olive oil is a staple food in Mediterranean cuisine. Olive oil is rich in vitamin E, beta-carotene, and monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA) that help support optimal cardiovascular health.

03

Enjoy an abundance of vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, and seeds

Include a variety of vegetables and fruits rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Two or more servings of vegetables should be included with both lunch and dinner every day. Try to eat at least one of these servings raw.

04

Consume whole grains every day

Whole grains are rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates, which provide a great source of energy. One to two servings of whole grains (e.g., sourdough bread, rice, pasta, or others) should be consumed at every meal.

05

Include small amounts of dairy products daily

While butter, cream, and milk are rarely consumed, fermented dairy products such as yogurt and cheese can be consumed daily. In addition to containing protein, vitamins, and minerals (e.g., calcium, phosphorus), fermented dairy has the added benefit of containing live microorganisms, which support the health of our intestinal microbiota and provide a number of health benefits.



06

Focus on lean meats, fish, and other seafood

Meat is rich in protein, saturated fat, and a number of important vitamins and minerals (e.g., B12, iron). Small amounts of animal protein are included in the diet, primarily from poultry and fish. Eggs may be consumed in moderation, while intake of red meat and processed meat should be minimal. Look for cold-water or wild-caught fish and seafood, as well as free range or grass-fed meat and eggs.

07

Consume wine in moderation

While water should be the primary beverage consumed on the MD, red wine can be enjoyed in moderation as it is a traditional component of the diet and provides some health benefits. Red wine is a source of resveratrol, a type of polyphenol that may extend longevity as a result of its anticarcinogenic, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties.

Table 1 *Components of the Mediterranean Diet* found in the appendix section outlines the components of the Mediterranean diet, as well as examples of dietary sources, recommended number of servings, serving sizes, and beneficial properties for each. Servings are based on recommendations from the Mediterranean Diet Foundation.

Table 2 *Physical Activity Guidelines* found in the appendix section outlines physical activity recommendations by population.

08

Choose fresh fruit and occasional homemade treats for dessert

Fresh fruit can be consumed regularly, while sweets should be consumed only occasionally (e.g., special occasions). Homemade treats are always best as they are less refined than commercial alternatives and often incorporate ingredients encouraged on the MD (e.g., nuts, EVOO, honey).

09

Look for quality

Choose whole, fresh foods that are minimally processed. For the best nutrient value and flavor, purchase locally produced foods that are in-season in your area. Cooking your own meals is the best way to ensure you're aware of all of the ingredients going into your meal.

10

Engage in regular physical activity

Although not a dietary guideline, the MD incorporates regular physical activity as it is a key component to a healthy lifestyle.





Appendix:
Mediterranean diet resources



Grocery shopping list



Grains, pseudograins & flours

- Amaranth
- Barley
- Buckwheat
- Corn
- Millet
- Oats
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Sorghum
- Teff
- Wheat

Beans & legumes

- Adzuki beans
- Black beans
- Chickpeas
- Lentils
- Lima beans
- Peanuts
- Pinto beans
- Soybeans
- White beans

Meat, fish & shellfish

- Chicken
- Crab
- Duck
- Haddock
- Herring
- Lobster
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Shrimp
- Trout
- Tuna
- Turkey

Nuts & seeds

- Almonds
- Cashews
- Chestnuts
- Chia seeds
- Coconut
- Flax seeds
- Hazelnuts
- Hemp seeds
- Pine nuts
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sunflower seeds
- Tiger nuts
- Walnuts

Fruits

- Apples
- Apricots
- Avocado
- Bananas
- Berries
- Cherries
- Figs
- Grapefruit
- Grapes
- Kiwi
- Lemon
- Lime
- Mango
- Melon
- Olives
- Papaya
- Pears
- Plum
- Pineapple
- Plantains
- Plums
- Pomegranates
- Quince
- Tomato
- Watermelon

Vegetables

- Artichoke
- Asparagus
- Beets
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Chard
- Cucumbers
- Eggplant
- Endives
- Fennel
- Garlic
- Green beans
- Leafy greens
- Leek
- Mushrooms
- Okra
- Onions
- Peas
- Parsnips
- Pumpkin
- Radishes
- Sea vegetables
(e.g., dulse, kombu,
nori, wakame)
- Squashes
- Sweet potatoes
- Turnips
- Watercress
- Yams
- Zucchini

Oils

- Extra virgin avocado oil
- Virgin coconut oil
- Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO)

Vinegars

- Apple cider vinegar
- Balsamic vinegar
- Red wine vinegar
- White wine vinegar

Sweeteners

- Coconut sugar
- Raw honey
- Monk fruit
- Pure maple syrup
- Stevia leaf extract

Herbal teas

- Chamomile
- Dandelion root
- Ginger
- Lavender
- Nettle
- Peppermint
- Rooibos
- Thistle

Herbs & spices

- Allspice
- Anise
- Basil
- Bay leaves
- Black pepper
- Cayenne pepper
- Cloves
- Cilantro (coriander)
- Cumin
- Cinnamon
- Dill
- Fennel
- Fenugreek
- Lemon balm
- Ginger
- Marjoram
- Nutmeg
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Pepper
- Rosemary
- Saffron
- Sage
- Savory
- Tarragon
- Thyme
- Turmeric

Notes

Hidden sugars list

Did you know that there are over 60 different names for sugar? Typically, you will be able to recognize if an ingredient is present in a food by referring to the ingredient label. However, certain dietary ingredients may be listed under a different name or may be derived from a certain food, making them difficult to recognize. The Mediterranean diet limits the intake of added sugars, which include:

- Agave nectar
- Barbados sugar
- Barley malt
- Barley malt syrup
- Beet sugar
- Brown sugar
- Buttered syrup
- Cane juice
- Cane juice crystals
- Cane sugar
- Caramel
- Carob syrup
- Castor sugar
- Confectioner's sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Corn syrup solids
- Date sugar
- Dehydrated cane juice
- Demerara sugar
- Dextrin
- Dextrose
- Evaporated cane juice
- Fructose
- Fruit juice
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Glucose
- Golden sugar
- Golden syrup
- Granulated sugar
- Grape sugar
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Icing sugar
- Invert sugar
- Malt syrup
- Maltodextrin
- Maltol
- Maltose
- Mannose
- Molasses
- Muscovado
- Panocha
- Powdered sugar
- Raw sugar
- Refiner's syrup
- Rice syrup
- Saccharose
- Sorghum syrup
- Sucrose
- Sweet sorghum
- Syrup
- Treacle
- Turbinado sugar
- Yellow sugar



Diet diary



Use the following table to track your weekly diet, sleep, and physical activity.

To ensure you are meeting the daily and weekly recommended servings of each food component, simply add a check mark or a tally in the appropriate box

Component	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Vegetables							
Non-starchy: 6 /day minimum							
Potatoes: 3 /week maximum							
Fruit							
3-6 /day							
EVOO							
3-6 /day							
Grains							
3-6 /day							
Dairy							
2 /day							
Olives, nuts & seeds							
1-2 /day							
Eggs							
2-4 /week							
Beans & legumes							
2 /week minimum							
Fish & shellfish							
2 /week minimum							
Meat							
White meat: 2 /week							
Red meat: 1 /week maximum							
Processed meat: 1 /week maximum							
Sweets							
2 /week maximum							
Red wine							
Females: ≤ 1 /day							
Males: ≤ 2 /day							

Table 1:

Components of the Mediterranean diet

Component	Examples of dietary sources	Recommended servings	Serving size	Beneficial properties
Vegetables	Primarily non-starchy leafy greens, cauliflower, zucchini, onion, garlic, tomatoes, etc.	Non-starchy: 6 /day minimum Potatoes: 3 /week maximum	Raw: 1 cup Cooked: ½ cup	Phenolic compounds, carotenoids, folic acid, fiber, phytosterols
Fruit	Apples, bananas, berries, citrus fruit, figs, grapes, pears, quince, etc.	3-6 /day	Whole fruit: 1 fruit All other fruit: ½ cup	Fiber, potassium, vitamin A, vitamin C, B vitamins (e.g., folate), flavonoids, terpenes
EVOO (primary culinary fat)	n/a	3-6 /day	1 tbsp	Monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs), polyphenols, α-tocopherol
Grains	Preferably whole grains (e.g., wheat, barley, buckwheat, oats, corn, millet)	3-6 /day	Bread: 1 slice Cooked grains: ½ cup Pasta: ½ cup	Fermentable carbohydrates (e.g., fiber, resistant starch, oligosaccharides), B vitamins (e.g., folate), vitamin E, iron, magnesium, copper, selenium, phytochemicals, antioxidants, trace minerals, phenolic compounds, lignans
Dairy	Primarily fermented (e.g., yogurt, cheese)	2 /day	Milk: 1 cup Yogurt: ¾ cup Cheese: 1 ½ oz (50 g)	Vitamin A, vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, potassium, lactic acid bacteria (probiotic)

Olives, nuts & seeds	Olives, almonds, cashews, chestnuts, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, pine nuts	1-2 /day	Nuts and seeds: 1 oz (28 g) Nut and seed butters: 2 tbsp	MUFAs, fiber, vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, magnesium, antioxidants (e.g., flavonoids, resveratrol, polyphenols, tocopherols)
Eggs	Preferably free-range or omega-3 enriched	2-4 /week	1 whole egg	Protein, vitamin A, vitamin D, vitamin E, choline, vitamin B12, riboflavin, phosphorus, selenium, carotenoids (e.g., lutein, zeaxanthin)
Beans & legumes	Beans (e.g., black, adzuki, white, soybeans), chickpeas, lentils, peanuts	2 /week minimum	Cooked: ½ cup	Fiber, protein, B vitamins, iron, zinc, calcium, magnesium, selenium, phosphorus, copper, potassium
Fish & shellfish	Salmon, sardines, tuna, herring, trout, haddock, shrimp, lobster, crab	2 /week minimum	2 ½ oz. (75 g)	Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), providing EPA and DHA
Meat	Primarily white meat/poultry (e.g., chicken turkey) Preferably wild, free-range, and grass-fed	White meat: 2 /week Red meat: 1 /week maximum Processed meat: 1 /week maximum	2 ½ oz. (75 g)	Protein, vitamin B12, iron, selenium *Adverse health outcomes associated with excess consumption of red meat and saturated fat
Sweets	Preferably homemade	2 /week maximum	Dark chocolate: 1 oz. (28 g)	Homemade treats are less refined than commercial alternatives and often incorporate ingredients encouraged on the MD (e.g., nuts, EVOO)
Red wine	n/a	Females: ≤1 /day Males: ≤2 /day	Standard glass: 5 oz. (150 mL)	Phenolic compounds with high antioxidant properties

Table 2:

Physical activity guidelines

Population	Type of activity	Activity frequency	Activity duration (minimum)
Children 3 to 5	Active play (variety of activities)	Daily	Unlimited throughout the day
Children 6 to 17	Aerobic	Daily	60 minutes /day; aerobic activity should make up most of the 60 minutes
	Muscle-strengthening	3 or more days /week	
	Bone-strengthening	3 or more days /week	
Adults	Moderate intensity aerobic	Spread throughout the week	150 to 300 minutes /week
	Muscle-strengthening; involving all major muscle groups	2 or more days /week	
Older adults	A combination of: Balance training, aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening Intensity should be determined by individual level of fitness	Spread throughout the week	150 minutes /week

The information provided in this table is based on recommendations from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Please note that individual recommendations may vary depending on health status, life events (e.g., pregnancy), and health conditions.

Physical activity examples

- **Balance training:** tai chi, yoga, pilates, using a stability ball or balance board
- **Aerobic activities:** brisk walking, jogging, dancing, swimming, tennis, cycling, ice skating
- **Bone-strengthening activities:** jumping jacks, jumping rope, lifting weights, skipping, running
- **Muscle-strengthening activities:** lifting weights, hiking, climbing stairs, working with resistance bands, body weight exercises (e.g., pushups, squats)



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