

The Keys to a Heart-Healthy Diet

The key components of the Mediterranean diet include:

- Eating whole grains, fruits, vegetables and plant-based fats every day.
- Eating fish, poultry, eggs, beans and legumes weekly.
- Eating only moderate portions of dairy.
- Eating a limited amount of red meat.
- Drinking a sensible amount of red wine.
- Taking part in regular physical activity.
- Drinking water or unsweetened tea every day.
- Using fresh herbs and spices for flavoring.
- Making mealtime a social gathering with family and friends.

Know what to eat

Fruit and vegetables

Incorporating fruits and vegetables into your diet on a regular basis helps you to meet your daily requirements for vitamins, minerals and fiber. Additionally, these foods are excellent sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals (plant-based nutrients) that support our health in numerous ways.

It is important to choose a variety of produce based on the type, color and preparation method.

Various preparation methods can affect content and bioavailability of nutrients. While some nutrients will dissipate quickly with heat, others become more readily absorbed after being cooked.

A good goal is to aim for 2 to 3 servings of fruits and 4 or more servings of vegetables per day. If this sounds like a lot for you, always remember that some is better than none!

- One serving of fruit equals:
 - 1 medium piece of fruit
 - 1 cup of cut fruit
- One serving of vegetables equals:
 - 2 cups leafy vegetables
 - 1 cup raw vegetables
 - ½ cup cooked vegetables

More tips:

- Eat seasonal produce.
- Wash your produce to remove dirt and surface pesticides before you eat it.
- Buy canned fruit in water or its own juice.
- If you buy frozen fruit and vegetables, be sure to read the labels and avoid added sodium and sugar. Flash frozen vegetables and fruit keep their nutrients better in the freezing process.

Fast facts

People in Greece eat an average of nine servings a day of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Some 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.

Seafood

Fish and shellfish are excellent sources of protein. Additionally, cold-water fish contain high amounts of heart healthy, anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats. Examples of cold-water fish include albacore tuna, salmon, lake trout, sardines, mackerel and herring.

Try to eat three or more servings of fish per week. One serving equals 3 to 5 ounces, which is about the size of a standard deck of cards.

Poultry

Choose white meat or poultry, such as chicken and turkey, without the skin. One serving is 3 ounces, which is 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. Some examples of legumes are split peas, lentils and peanuts. Limit your intake of peanuts; they are high in fat. Some examples of beans are red, green, black, lima, kidney, soy and navy. Most legumes and beans are high in fiber and protein and low in fat. Legumes and beans can be a healthy and inexpensive substitute for meat.

Grains

Whole grains are part of a balanced diet as they provide your body with fiber, vitamins and minerals. Choosing 100% whole grains, instead of white refined products, ensures maximum nutrient content within your foods and helps to regulate blood sugar levels.

Serving sizes for various grain products vary. Always check the nutrition facts label and talk to your dietitian to determine the number of servings that is best for you.



Nuts and seeds

Nuts and seeds are excellent sources of a variety of nutrients such as dietary fat, fiber, vitamins and minerals. For example, almonds are rich in protein, while Brazil nuts contain high amounts of selenium. Nuts are perfect for snacks and pair well with salads, yogurt and many other dishes.

Try to eat four servings of nuts per week. One serving equals 1/4 cup. Be sure to look for raw, unsalted nuts and seeds.

Healthy fat

The Mediterranean diet focuses on regularly choosing foods high in unsaturated fat. Unsaturated fat can help reduce your LDL cholesterol level. A good choice of unsaturated fat is olive oil. It is a staple in the Mediterranean diet. Extra-virgin olive oil and virgin olive oil are the least-processed forms and provide antioxidant benefits. Olive oil can be used instead of butter or margarine.

Unsaturated fats are plant-based and liquid at room temperature. While coconut oil can be liquid in warmer climates, it is high in saturated fat and is not the best choice for regular cooking. Additional sources of unsaturated fat include grapeseed oil and avocado oil.

Limit saturated fats and avoid hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils. These are called trans fats. They can contribute to heart disease. Look for these words on nutrition labels to help you determine which products are healthiest for you.



Dairy

Dairy can be a good source of protein and calcium. Choose low-fat or non-fat products, such as skim milk or 1% milk, low-fat cottage cheese or sliced cheese, and low-fat or non-fat yogurt.

Avoid yogurt with added sugar. Add your own fruit or flavoring to plain yogurt, if you prefer.

Balance your plate

A healthy meal includes about half a plate of non-starchy vegetables and fruit, a quarter plate 100% whole grains and a quarter plate of a lean protein. Starchy vegetables include potatoes, corn, peas and winter squash. Limit the amount of starchy vegetables you eat. Dairy could be skim milk or reduced-fat yogurt. Limited amounts of healthy fats are included too.



Mediterranean cooking

Tomato sauce

Homemade tomato sauce is commonly used in Mediterranean dishes. Cook with sauce made from tomato, garlic and onion, plus herbs to taste. Use it over vegetables, pasta, rice and other dishes. You can make this sauce with olive oil and chopped ingredients. Simmer slowly over low heat.

Extra-virgin olive oil

Use extra-virgin olive oil most often for low-heat cooking, such as sautéing. Do not use it for frying or other high-heat cooking methods. Use it for salad dressing as well.

Herbs and spices

Choose herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor your food. They taste great and are better for most people than salt (sodium). Consider adding oregano, thyme, garlic, basil, mint, parsley, rosemary and sage.

Consider meatless meals

Many people find going meatless for some or all of their meals works well within the Mediterranean diet. Meatless meals could include lentils, beans and soy as the main protein source.

Know what to eat less of

Limit foods high in saturated fat and sugar when following a Mediterranean diet.

Red meat and processed meats

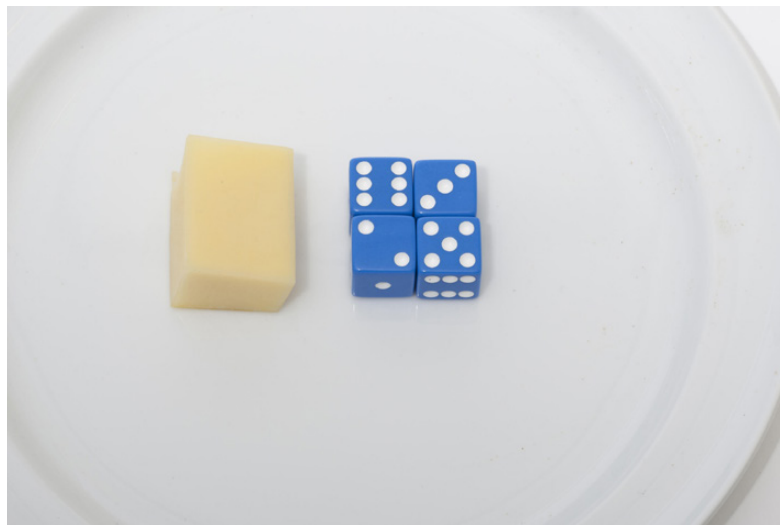
Limit red and processed meat, including beef, pork, goat, lamb, hot dogs, sausages, brats, cured ham, cold cuts and packaged lunch meat. Be sure to remove all the fat you can see before you cook the meat.

High-sugar, high-fat and highly processed foods

Limit high-sugar desserts, including pastries, cakes, cookies, candy and pudding. Also limit fried foods, such as French fries and potato chips.

High-fat dairy products

Limit whole and 2% milk, butter, margarine and ice cream. Limit the amount of cheese you eat. One serving of cheese is the size of four small dice.



High sugar drinks

Avoid sweetened and sugary beverages. Carbonated water is fine. Limit fruit juice. Eating a whole fruit provides more nutrients and health benefits.



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 can reduce 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 fine too. **Limit your intake to one glass per day.** **Drink it with a meal.** In general, 5 ounces is considered one glass of wine. Studies have shown benefit for men when they drink 5 ounces of wine per day and for women when they drink 3 ounces of wine per day.

Water

The best fluid for the body is water. Your body depends on water to regulate body temperature, remove wastes and carry nutrients and oxygen to your cells, among other tasks.

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 your meals as frequently as possible and limit distractions while you eat. Take at least 20 minutes to enjoy those meals, and try to eat as many meals as possible with family and friends.

Exercise

Daily physical activity and regular exercise are important to support and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This includes leisure activities but also getting a set amount of vigorous activity. General recommendations are to get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week.