



PATIENT EDUCATION

*Mediterranean Diet*

learning **EDUCATION** EXCELLENCE  
**HEALTHY** CARING INTERACTION  
**LIVING**

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS  
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER



# The Mediterranean Diet

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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 Mediterranean diet is more than a “diet.” It is a heart-healthy eating plan. For most people, what is 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 lower your risk for:**

- Death from cardiovascular disease and stroke.
- Cancer and death from cancer.
- Alzheimer’s, a disease that affects the brain, and Parkinson’s, a disease that affects the nervous system.
- Type 2 diabetes.

The Mediterranean diet is shown to improve the effects of inflammatory diseases such as arthritis. In addition, it also may improve the well-being of those with depression.

Studies have shown a reduction in:

- Dementia.
- Frailty.
- Macular degeneration in people 60 years of age and older.
- Childhood asthma.
- Erectile dysfunction and female sexual dysfunction.
- Metabolic syndrome.
- Arthritis.

If you have questions after you read this or want more information about this eating plan, talk with your health care provider or a registered dietitian.



# The Keys to a Heart-Healthy Diet

The key components of the Mediterranean diet include:

- Daily consumption of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and plant-based fats.
- Weekly intake of fish, poultry, eggs, beans, and legumes.
- Moderate portions of dairy.
- Limited intake of red meat.
- Sensible amount of red wine.
- Regular physical activity.
- Daily consumption of water or unsweetened tea.
- Use of fresh herbs and spices for flavoring.
- Social dining with family and friends.

## Know what to eat

### Vegetables

Eat four 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. Steam vegetables, rather than boiling them in water.

Choose well-hydrated, firm, crisp and unblemished produce. Rinse it thoroughly under running water to remove dirt and surface pesticides.

### Fruit

Eat two or three servings per day or more of fresh fruit. One serving is one whole fresh fruit, medium size or about 1 cup of fresh fruit. Include the juices, pulp, skin and fiber as appropriate. Try to eat fruits that are in season. If you buy frozen fruit, look for products that are “fresh frozen.”

Choose well-hydrated, firm, crisp and unblemished produce. Rinse it thoroughly under running water to remove dirt and surface pesticides.



### 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.

### Fish and shellfish

Eat three or more servings per week of fish or shellfish. One serving is 3 to 5 ounces of fish or 6 to 7 ounces of shellfish. Some examples of fish are cod, tilapia, walleye, salmon, tuna, trout, and whitefish. Some examples of shellfish are shrimp, scallop, crab, and lobster. One or more of the servings should be a fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, or trout.

You may eat fish as often as you wish. Many people near the Mediterranean eat fish every day.

### Poultry

Choose white meat of 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

Bread that is 100 percent whole grain or whole wheat is an important part of the diet in the Mediterranean. Whole-grain cereal also is included. Multi-grain breads are not 100 percent whole-grain bread. Whole grain or whole wheat provides fiber, vitamin E, B vitamins, selenium, and phytochemicals. One serving usually is one slice of bread. Often, bread is eaten plain or dipped in olive oil.



## Nuts and seeds

Eat four 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 — walnuts, hazelnuts and almonds — are suggested as snacks. Nuts are high in fat, but most of it is unsaturated fat. Unsaturated fat is healthier to eat than saturated fat 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 commonly is used instead of butter or margarine. Olive oil has monounsaturated fat, which is a type of fat that can help reduce your LDL or “bad” cholesterol level. Extra-virgin olive oil and virgin olive oil are the least-processed forms. They 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.

## Dairy

Dairy products can come from a cow, goat or sheep. They are a good source of protein and calcium. Choose low-fat or nonfat products such as skim milk or 1 percent, low-fat cottage cheese or sliced cheese, and low-fat or nonfat yogurt.

An animal-alternative “milk” can come from soy, rice or almonds. When choosing an animal-alternative “milk,” make sure it is fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

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

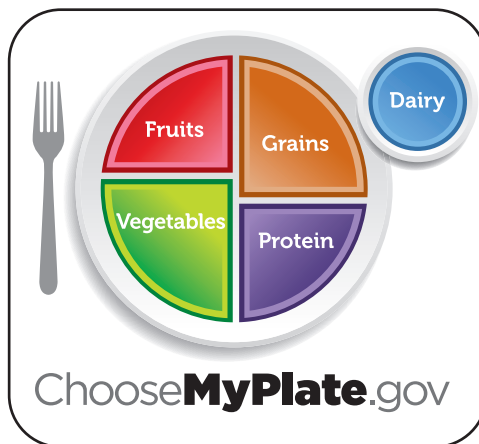
## Other foods

Limit egg yolks to three or four per week.

Choose dark chocolate with **at least** 50 percent cocoa.

## Know how much to eat

A healthy meal includes about half a plate of vegetables and fruit, a quarter-plate of 100 percent 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.



## Use new ways to cook

### Tomato sauce

At least two times 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 chopped ingredients. Simmer slowly over a low heat.

### Extra-virgin olive oil

Use extra-virgin olive oil 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.

### 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 turmeric, curry powder, ginger, garlic, chili pepper and cinnamon.

### 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 whole grain pasta, rice or other dishes that use legumes or beans as the main protein source. These dishes should have more amounts of vegetables and legumes, lesser amounts of pasta or rice.

## Know what to avoid or eat less of

These foods typically have a lot of fat and calories.

### Red meat and processed meats

Limit red meat, such as beef, pork, goat or lamb, to five or less servings per week. Limit your intake to one serving per week of processed meat such as 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 and 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 percent 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) and other high sugar drinks

Avoid sweetened (sugary) and diet carbonated drinks, especially colas. Carbonated water is fine. Limit fruit juice. Eating the 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.

### Omega-3 fatty acids

Monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats, such as canola oil and some nuts, have the beneficial linolenic acid. Linolenic acid is a type of omega-3 fatty acid. Omega-3 fatty acids lower triglycerides and decrease blood clotting. They also are associated with decreased sudden heart attack. They can 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.

### 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 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.

### 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.

# Inventory: How Do You Eat Now?

If you answer yes to a question, put a 1 next to that question. Then add up your total points.

Do you use olive oil as your main cooking fat?	
Do you use an olive-oil-based sauce <b>2 or more times per week?</b>	
Do you eat <b>4 Tablespoons (Tbsp.) or more per day</b> of olive oil?	
Do you eat <b>4 or more servings per day</b> 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 <b>3 or more servings per day</b> 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 <b>3 or more servings per week</b> 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 <b>4 or more servings per week</b> of nuts? 1 serving is a quarter-cup.	
Do you eat <b>3 or more servings per week</b> 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)?	
Do you eat <b>1 serving or less per day</b> 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 <b>1 serving or less per day</b> of butter, margarine or cream? 1 serving is 1 teaspoon (tsp.).	
Do you drink <b>1 can or less per day</b> of carbonated cola (soda)? 1 can is 12 oz.	
Do you eat <b>3 servings or less per week</b> 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>	
<b>Your total points:</b>	

## What does it all mean?

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



### BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

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