



810 Valley View Blvd. Altoona, PA 16602 (814) 946-5469

## **Mediterranean Diet Purpose**

A well-planned diet plays a major role in keeping the body fit and preventing illness. In the United States, the food guide pyramid is the regular diet recommended for healthy people over two years of age. In other parts of the world, agriculture, climate, and cultural differences influence what foods people eat and how those foods are prepared. Yet, these diets may also be healthy. Prior to the 1960s, for example, in countries around the Mediterranean sea -- parts of Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Portugal, and north Africa -- chronic disease rates were low and adult life expectancy, high. However, the economies of these countries have changed in the past 30 years. Their diets have become more like the American diet, and certain disease rates have also increased, suggesting that their traditional diets were healthier. Based on extensive scientific research to identify what was healthy about those pre-1960 diets, a different type of regular diet -- the Mediterranean diet -- has been developed.

### **Nutrition Facts**

This diet is adequate in all the nutrients needed by most healthy adults. However, the diet may need to be altered for children, people with certain medical conditions, or women during pregnancy. A physician or registered dietician should be consulted in those cases.

<b>Some Food Sources of Fiber</b>	
<b>Insoluble Fiber</b>	<b>Soluble Fiber</b>
Whole grains; including wheat, rye, brown rice, bran, and cereals	Citrus fruits
Cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower	Strawberries
Root vegetables	Oatmeal
Dried peas and beans	Dried beans and other legumes
Apples	Apples

## **Foods Eaten Daily**

Foods from plant sources occupy the biggest portion of the Mediterranean diet -- potatoes and foods from grains; fruits, vegetables, beans, other legumes, and nuts. Bread is an important part of the diet, usually enjoyed without butter or margarine.

It is also very important to maintain variety and minimal processing of foods. Every meal should include choices from each daily food group. For example, a good breakfast is not just oatmeal or a piece of whole wheat toast. It should also include fruit, and perhaps nuts or low-fat yogurt. A lunch or main meal in North Africa might include a combination of couscous, vegetables, and legumes. In Italy, it might be pasta or polenta with vegetables and legumes. Nuts and seeds are often included in recipes, and dessert is usually fresh fruit. Choose seasonally fresh and locally grown fruits and vegetables when possible, and use whole grain foods. Processing of foods can remove important nutrients. For example, when grains are refined, fiber is lost.

Fiber is the indigestible part of plants. There are two types: Insoluble fiber, such as wheat bran, does not dissolve in water, so it helps the body to regulate bowel function by adding bulk. Soluble fiber is the type found in certain grains, beans, and in many fruits. It does dissolve in water and forms a sticky gel that may sweep harmful substances from the intestines. There is evidence that soluble fiber helps to reduce cholesterol levels, and may decrease the risk of developing certain cancers. So, it is recommended that people eat 20 to 30 grams of fiber a day, which should include both soluble and insoluble fibers.

Fruits and vegetables: Choose a variety of whole fresh fruits over canned and frozen, which often contain large amounts of added sugar. Whole fruits contain more fiber than is found in fruit juice, but if choosing fruit juice, make sure it is 100% fruit juice.

Choose a wide variety of vegetables to get a balance of the nutrients they provide. Select dark green leafy vegetables over light green. Romaine lettuce, for example, has about six times as much vitamin C and eight times as much beta carotene as iceberg lettuce. Eat vegetables raw when possible, however cooked vegetables can also be nutritious. Do not over-cook. Sometimes the method of preparation helps to preserve or enhance nutrients. For example, vitamin C-rich vegetables lose half of the vitamin when boiled, but only 15% when microwaved.

Nuts and Legumes (peas and beans) are good sources of fiber, vitamins, minerals, and protein, and can be used in place of meat. A half cup of

cooked dried beans has many of the benefits of one ounce of meat, but none of the saturated fat found in meat.

Small amounts of nuts and seeds are also good choices for calcium, zinc, and protein.

They do contain more fat than legumes, but most of the fat is unsaturated fat. Coconut, however, is very high in saturated fat and should be avoided.

**Olive Oil and Total Fat:** Olive oil is the principal fat in the Mediterranean diet. To understand why this is a healthy fat choice, it helps to know something about fats and cholesterol.

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance needed for important functions in the body.

However, too much cholesterol in the blood can increase the risk of heart disease. Cholesterol is found in foods from animal sources, because animals produce cholesterol in their bodies, just as the human body does. In fact, the human body produces all the cholesterol it needs. This is why it is recommended that dietary cholesterol be limited to an average of 300 milligrams (mg) or less a day. A certain amount of fat is also needed in a healthy diet, to supply energy and a few nutrients. However, too much fat in the diet can increase the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. There are different kinds of fat in foods, and some types are worse than others.

Saturated fats are found in dairy products made with whole milk and in meat. Some meats contain more saturated fat than others: beef more than chicken. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature. Some vegetable fats such as coconut, cocoa butter (found in chocolate), palm and palm kernel oils are also saturated. The liver uses certain nutrients, and especially saturated fats, as the building blocks of cholesterol. Therefore, eating too much saturated fat raises blood cholesterol, increasing the risk of heart disease.

Hydrogenated oils is a term often found in food labels. Through a manufacturing process, liquid vegetable oils can be made to stay solid at room temperature. Therefore, they act as saturated fats and should be avoided in the diet.

Unsaturated fats, found mostly in plants, are liquid at room temperature. They are less likely to cause heart disease. Polyunsaturated fats are found in safflower, sunflower, corn, soybean, and cottonseed oils and in some fish. Recent research shows that monounsaturated fats found in olive, peanut, and canola oils may even lower cholesterol.

It is recommended that a healthy diet have only 30% of the total daily calories in fat, and saturated fat should be only 1/3 of that amount. Prior to

the 1960s, the Mediterranean diets averaged about 30% to 35% fat and the principal fat used was olive oil. Their rates of heart disease were as much as 90% lower than those in the

U.S. So, it seems reasonable that olive oil may be a healthier fat choice in the diet.

However, do not add olive oil to other sources of fat; instead use it to replace them.

**Dairy products:** This is the smallest proportion of foods to be eaten daily. They are good sources of calcium, but are high in saturated fats.

Mediterraneans use about one cup of milk per day, and this is usually used in preparing foods. Small amounts of flavorful cheeses (such as those grated over pastas) may be used everyday, but should not exceed 2 to 3 ounces per week. When using dairy products, choose low-fat varieties such as skim or 1% fat milk, low-fat yogurt, and "part skim" or low-fat cheeses.

### **Foods Eaten a Few Times a Week**

Foods from animal sources are used very little in the Mediterranean countries. Proteins are required for growth and normal development of the body.

However, as previously mentioned, protein can be obtained in lower-fat food choices than meat. Children, teenagers, and women who are pregnant or breast-feeding, should consult their physicians about protein requirements. For other adults following the Mediterranean diet, fish and poultry may be eaten a few times a week. Ocean fish and shellfish contain high concentrations of certain oils that can reduce the risk of heart disease. Fish oil supplements are not recommended; they add too many calories to the diet.

**Eggs:** Mediterraneans traditionally eat no more than four eggs per week, including those used in baking and preparing foods. That is a good guide to follow because eggs are high in cholesterol and saturated fat. Use only one yolk per person in egg dishes, and substitute egg whites if more eggs are called for.

**Sweets and desserts:** Mediterraneans favor fresh fruit for dessert. They eat sweets with large amounts of sugar and saturated fats only a few times a week and in small amounts. Added sugar (in processing, preparing, or at the table) increases calories without providing nutrients. Sugars include white sugar, brown sugar, raw sugar, corn syrup, honey, and molasses. Foods like soft drinks, candy, ice cream, jams, jellies, chocolate milk, and fruits canned in heavy syrups are high in sugar and should be limited in the diet.

## **Foods Eaten a Few Times a Month**

Red Meat should be eaten only a few times a month. It may be used a little more often in very small amounts, to flavor pasta sauces or soups, for example. There is evidence that too much red meat in the diet may contribute not only to heart disease, but also to certain types of cancer. No more than 12 to 16 ounces of red meat should be eaten each month. Choose lean cuts and trim away visible fat. Broil, roast, or bake instead of pan frying.

## **Special Considerations**

**Physical Activity:** Extensive research shows that regular physical activity helps to control weight and provides other health benefits. Walking and bicycling, for example, are typical methods of getting from place to place in many parts of the Mediterranean, and some form of regular physical activity or exercise is an important part of the Mediterranean diet.

Diet related lifestyle habits in the Mediterranean may contribute to good health. Mealtime is not rushed; people usually relax at the table, sharing food and conversation with family and friends. This helps to reduce stress and improve the body's ability to digest foods and absorb nutrients.

## **Drinking wine:**

In some parts of the Mediterranean, wine is enjoyed in moderation, usually with a leisurely meal. Some medical studies have indicated that a glass of red wine each day may produce benefits for the cardiovascular system. Although excessive alcohol intake is the cause of many health problems, one or two glasses of wine a day for men and one glass for women may provide benefits when taken with a meal. It is always a good idea to get the advice of a physician on this matter. Furthermore, if you are a non-drinker, do not begin to use alcohol just for this uncertain benefit.

<b>Sample Menu</b>		
<b>Breakfast</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Dinner</b>

<p>cereal <i>3/4 cup</i> skim milk <i>1/2 cup</i> banana <i>1</i> margarine <i>1 tsp</i> whole wheat toast <i>1 slice</i> olive oil <i>1/2 tbspp</i> sliced almonds <i>1/2 oz</i></p>	<p>lentil soup <i>1 cup</i> hard roll <i>1</i> olive oil <i>1/2 tbsp</i> spinach <i>1 cup</i> romaine lettuce <i>1 cup</i> chopped mushrooms <i>1/4 cup</i> radishes <i>2</i> balsamic vinegar <i>1/2 oz</i></p>	<p>pasta <i>1 1/2 cup</i> tomatos <i>1/2 cup</i> broccoli <i>1/2 cup</i> squash/zucchini <i>1/2 cup</i> sweet peppers <i>1/4 cup</i> chopped mushrooms <i>1/4cup</i> olive oil <i>2 tbsp</i> parmesan cheese <i>1 tbsp</i> white beans <i>1.2 cup</i> red wine vinegar <i>1/2 oz</i> garlic <i>1 clove</i> whole wheat bread <i>1 slice</i> grapes <i>1/2 cup</i></p>	
<b>Snack</b>			
<p>plain yogurt <i>1 cup</i> blueberries <i>1/2 cup</i></p>			
<p><b>This Sample Diet Provides the Following</b></p>			
Calories	2000	Fat	73 gm
Protein	7 gm	Fiber	34 gm
Carbohydrates	284 gm	Calcium	1293 gm

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Blair Gastroenterology Associates for the typical patient with your condition. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition, or your treatment plan.