

A DELICIOUS PATH TO HEALTH

Indulge in the important aspects of the Mediterranean Diet that have been touted as one of the most nourishing diets in the world

Traditional eating habits seen in geographical territories surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, although differentiated by some food choices and cooking practices specific to each country and culture, share a common set of basic features. The specific dietary dimension of the Mediterranean lifestyle consists of a plant-based cuisine using vegetables, fruits, cereals, nuts, and legumes, most of them cooked by adding substantial amounts of olive oil, with moderate usage of fish, seafood or dairy, and limited intake of meat.

The concept of the Mediterranean Diet began in the 1950s. That's when an American researcher named Ancel Keys began the Seven Countries Study. This study spanned decades. It investigated links between diet and cardiovascular disease around the world.

As part of the study, Keys and his team looked at eating patterns in Greece and Italy in the 1950s and 1960s. They found those eating patterns were linked with lower rates of coronary artery disease (compared with eating patterns in the US and Northern Europe). Thus, the heart-healthy Mediterranean Diet was born.

The Mediterranean region these days is nothing like it was six decades ago when it was first discovered. Instead, most things are modernised and dull health-wise. Globalisation pushed the Mediterraneans to produce agriculture loaded with hazardous chemicals for foreign trade and not for healthy purposes.

Meanwhile the countries of North Africa and the Middle East struggle the most with modernisation problems. This is because of the rapid urbanisation of their areas, which has led to the loss of vital agricultural land. As a result, they are also forced to depend more on costly food imports from outside the region.

The eating patterns of the people in the Mediterranean Basin have significantly changed over the years due to modernisation. The economy, environment, society and culture, disasters, the expansion of food industries, and advertising campaigns promoting certain foods (i.e. soda, candy bars) are among the most common factors that affect the traditional dietary customs of the region. So, there's room to adjust the Mediterranean Diet to your preferences and cultural traditions. This might mean keeping some traditional recipes the same (no ingredient substitutions) and eating them only on special occasions. Some recipes might be just as tasty and special to you with some substitutions (like olive oil instead of butter or extra herbs instead of salt).

There are no foods that are completely off-limits when following the Mediterranean diet, as it's more of an eating pattern than a regimented diet.

That said since the Mediterranean diet is based on traditional eating patterns that focused on whole, nutrient-dense foods, it's best to limit the following foods and drinks:

- ❖ Ultra-processed foods: candy, fast food, ultra-processed snack foods, etc.
- ❖ Processed meats: bacon, lunch meats, hot dogs, etc.
- ❖ Added sugar and sugary foods: soda, energy drinks, cakes, cookies, etc.
- ❖ Refined grains: whole grains should be prioritised over refined grains and refined grain products.



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How does lifestyle relate to the Mediterranean Diet?

To get the most from your eating plan, it is important to exercise regularly, ideally with others; avoid smoking or using any tobacco products; prepare and enjoy meals with family and friends; cook more often than you eat out and eat locally sourced foods whenever possible.

What does the Mediterranean Diet look like?

The Mediterranean Diet doesn't look the same for everyone. In general, it includes lots of whole grains, vegetables, and fruit along with moderate amounts of fish, legumes, and nuts.

It's also based on eating patterns across many different Mediterranean countries, each with its nuances. Because there's no single definition, the Mediterranean Diet is flexible, and you can tailor it to your needs.

A dietitian can help you modify this diet as needed based on your medical history, underlying conditions, allergies, and preferences.

Can the Mediterranean Diet be vegetarian?

Yes. If you prefer a vegetarian diet, you can easily modify the Mediterranean Diet to nuts and beans.

Benefits of Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean Diet has many benefits, including:

1. Lowering your risk of cardiovascular disease.
2. Supporting a body weight that's healthy for you.
3. Supporting healthy blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol.
4. Lowering your risk of metabolic syndrome.
5. Supporting a healthy balance of gut microbiota (bacteria and other microorganisms) in your digestive system.
6. Lowering your risk for certain types of cancer.
7. Helping you live longer.

