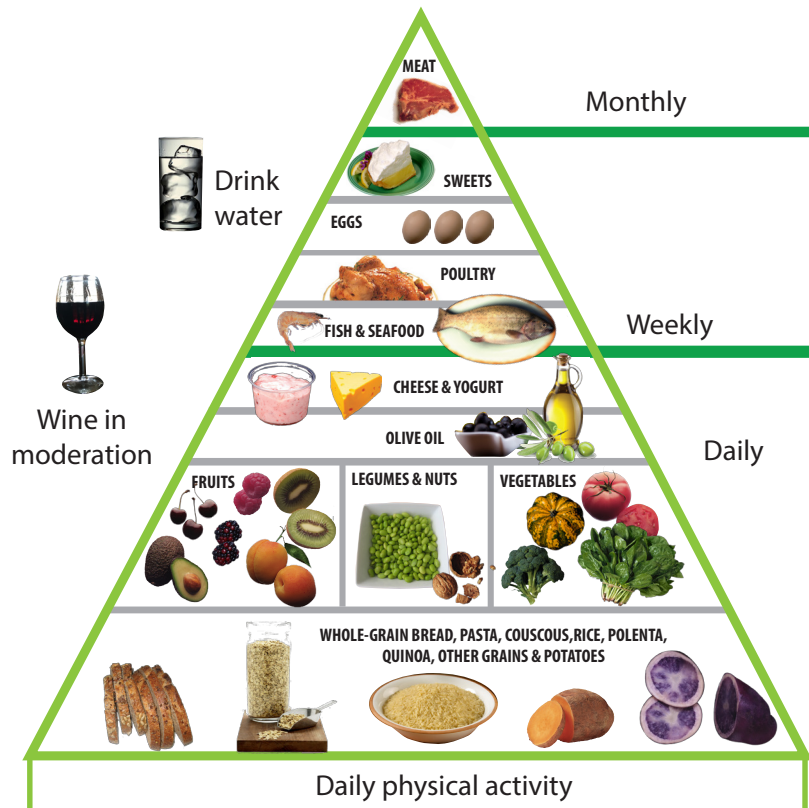


So just what is the Mediterranean diet ... and why should I care?



The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

The Mediterranean diet is not really a diet. It's more of a lifestyle approach to eating based on the traditional food habits and eating practices of Mediterranean countries. The Mediterranean meal pattern is characterized by vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices, whole grains, legumes, nuts, olive oil, yogurts, and cheeses with smaller amounts of fish, seafood, eggs, and poultry and very little red meat or sweets. Ample water and moderate amounts of red wine are part of the Mediterranean-style meal. Also, meals are considered social time. They are not to be eaten alone. The Mediterranean eating pattern in conjunction with routine physical activity reduces the risk of chronic diseases and establishes the foundation for an enduring health-friendly lifestyle.



What is the Mediterranean diet?

The Mediterranean food pyramid illustrates food patterns associated with the Mediterranean-style diet. This dietary and lifestyle guidance can be summarized as follows:

- Build meals and snacks around vegetables, whole grains (including breads and cereals), legumes, potatoes, nuts and seeds, and fruits. *high consumption, daily*
- Include fermented dairy products like low-fat or fat-free Greek yogurt or smaller amounts of cheese. *moderate consumption, daily*
- Add fish, seafood and poultry two to three times each week, and eat up to four eggs each week as the primary sources of animal protein. *moderate consumption, weekly*
- Think of red meats as *occasional* foods. Eat smaller and less-frequent servings. *low consumption, monthly*
- Enhance flavors and season foods with olive oil, garlic, onions, peppers and aromatic herbs, such as tarragon, oregano, basil, sage, mint, rosemary or parsley. Garnish with olives, seeds or avocados.
- Maintain portion sizes that are appropriate for you and your needs*.
- Drink water with meals and throughout the day. And, if so inclined, savor a serving of wine**.
- Try to share mealtime with others. Try to relax while eating and to enjoy your meals.
- Be physically active (but not while eating).

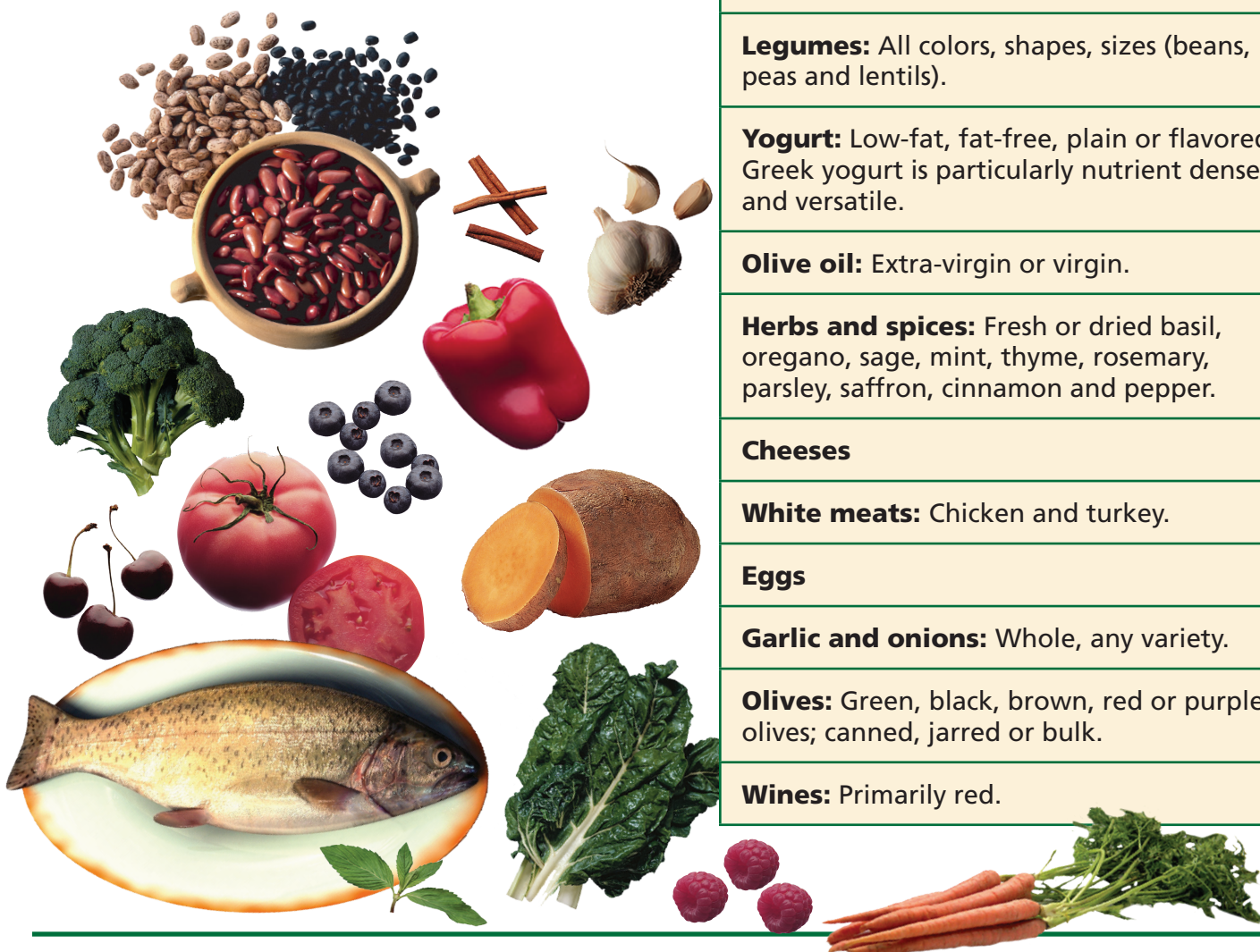
What are the health benefits?

The Mediterranean style of eating emphasizes appropriate amounts of foods rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants and unsaturated fats. It also recognizes the value of social connections and physical activity. The Mediterranean diet and lifestyle factors help to reduce blood pressure, LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, oxidative stress and cell damage, effectively reducing risk of:

- Cardiovascular diseases and stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Metabolic syndrome

These diet and lifestyle factors are credited with reducing the degree, intensity or progress of:

- Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia
- Depression
- Parkinson's disease
- Age-associated muscle weakness and frailty



How do I follow the Mediterranean diet?

First, develop your core shopping list and keep these items on hand.

Whole grains: Breads, cereals, bulgur, barley, farro, and brown, black or purple rice.

Fruits: All colors, shapes, sizes and textures, including berries, figs, bananas, cherries, oranges, avocados and lemons.

Vegetables: All colors, shapes, sizes and textures, including tomatoes, peppers, carrots, greens, squash and potatoes.

Nuts and seeds: Almonds, walnuts, pistachios, cashews, peanuts and sesame and sunflower seeds.

Fish and shellfish: Any type, but salmon and tuna are particularly heart healthy.

Legumes: All colors, shapes, sizes (beans, peas and lentils).

Yogurt: Low-fat, fat-free, plain or flavored. Greek yogurt is particularly nutrient dense and versatile.

Olive oil: Extra-virgin or virgin.

Herbs and spices: Fresh or dried basil, oregano, sage, mint, thyme, rosemary, parsley, saffron, cinnamon and pepper.

Cheeses

White meats: Chicken and turkey.

Eggs

Garlic and onions: Whole, any variety.

Olives: Green, black, brown, red or purple, olives; canned, jarred or bulk.

Wines: Primarily red.

Next, use these core foods to create or augment meals and snacks that will appeal to you and your family.

Here are a few basic ideas:

- Cook and dress salads with olive oil.
- Season vegetables and whole grains or breads with small amounts of olive oil and herbs instead of butter.
- Sauté onions, garlic, tomatoes and zucchini and condense to a thick sauce for fish, chicken or grains and garnish with olives, cheese, yogurt or walnuts.
- Prepare robust stews of beans or lentils with potatoes and greens as the meal focus.

Not yet ready to commit? Try these small changes.

- Include a vegetable or serving of vegetables with lunch and dinner.
- Add a whole grain, like quinoa, couscous or orzo, to your favorite soup next time you make it.
- Switch to olive oil — if you have not already.
- Experiment with nuts and fruit for a dessert.
- Have a glass of red wine with dinner or with an appetizer in place of a cocktail**.
- Take a walk after dinner. Try to get others to join you!

The Mediterranean eating style is all about whole, flavorful foods consumed in a pleasant manner. Combined with regular physical activity, it's a lifelong health-promoting plan that many people find to be easy and enjoyable. The Mediterranean eating style is part of a healthy lifestyle — and when it comes to creating healthier lifestyles, **even small changes can make a big difference over time!**

Additional resources

Here are links to Mediterranean diet-style recipes for main dishes, side dishes, soups, salads, snacks, desserts, and dips and dressings:

OLDWAYS

<https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet/traditional-med-diet>

MED Instead of MEDS

<http://medinsteadofmeds.com/category/recipes/sides/>

Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet-recipes/art-20046682>

*A **portion size** is whatever you choose to make it. But a **standard serving size** based on the USDA MyPlate (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlate>) is the serving size or amount of a food or beverage from a particular food group that is used to determine the recommended number of servings you need each day to maintain a healthy diet, given your energy requirements or goals.

For example, a MyPlate serving size of fruit could be 8 ounces of 100 percent fruit juice with a recommendation of 1½ to 2 servings of fruit a day for an average adult. A MyPlate serving of oil could be 1 tablespoon of olive oil with a recommendation of about 2 servings of oil a day for an average adult.

** Alcohol should be consumed only by adults of legal drinking age and only by adults for whom alcohol is not harmful. Alcohol should be consumed in moderation — up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. It is not recommended that individuals begin drinking or drink more. The amount of alcohol and calories in beverages varies and should be accounted for within the limits of healthy eating patterns.



Notes

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