

All about the Mediterranean Diet

What is the Mediterranean diet?

An eating pattern and lifestyle based on the traditional diet and regular physical activity of Mediterranean countries like Greece, Spain and Italy.¹

This eating pattern is focused on eating mostly plant foods, along with an abundance of extra virgin olive oil (EVOO), which is the primary source of fat in the diet.^{1,2,3}

Research has shown that the Mediterranean diet is associated with many health benefits such as improvements in heart health, mental health and weight maintenance.^{1,4,5}

Other aspects of the Mediterranean Diet

How food is eaten is another important part of the Mediterranean Diet - eating with others can improve mental wellbeing and help to build a positive relationship with food.^{6,7}

Including regular physical activity is also an important part of the Mediterranean diet. This can be through activities like walking, swimming, gardening, gym training, bike rides, as well as sports and games.

Foods to eat and limit when following a Mediterranean Diet

Eat Most

Plants

- Aim for a 4:1 ratio of plant to animal foods at each meal.⁸
- Choose a variety of different seasonal fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, seeds and nuts.^{1,9}
- Use herbs and spices to flavour meals.^{1,10}

These plant foods mean the Mediterranean diet is high in fibre, antioxidants, polyphenols, vitamins and minerals.^{9,10,11}



EVOO

- EVOO is the main fat source in the Mediterranean diet.
- Aim for 2-3 tablespoons per day.¹²
- Use for all cooking including frying, roasting, baking, dressing and barbecuing.^{1,12,13}

EVOO adds healthy fats, antioxidants and polyphenols to meals.^{12,13,14}



Eat Sometimes

Fish, white meat, eggs & dairy

- Eat fish/seafood twice per week.
- Eat moderate amounts of poultry, eggs and dairy.^{8,10}
- Choose fermented dairy products like yoghurt.^{8,10}



Eat Least

Red Meat

- Consume red meat infrequently and in small amounts.
- Aim for no more than once per week.⁸
- High intakes of red meat are associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer.¹⁵



Highly Processed Foods

- Avoid confectionary, chips, soft drinks and processed meats.¹
- These foods are associated with an increased risk of chronic disease.¹⁵



Type 2 Diabetes

Substantial evidence now shows that the Mediterranean Diet is an effective dietary pattern in the prevention and management of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM).^{11,16}

Research shows associations between the Mediterranean diet and:

- Decreased incidence of T2DM.^{17,18}
- Increased glucose metabolism in existing T2DM.^{17,19}
- Increased insulin sensitivity.^{18,20}

Heart Health

Research has shown a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Southern European countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain when the traditional lifestyle was more commonly practiced.¹

Adopting the Mediterranean lifestyle may reduce risk of CVD through:

- Decreasing LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol)^{21,22}
- Increasing HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol)^{21,22}
- Reducing blood pressure and inflammation^{21,22}

Mental Health

Emerging evidence suggests that the Mediterranean diet may improve gut bacteria diversity and hence gut health, potentially explaining why this diet may positively impact mood and mental health.⁴

Evidence also suggests this lifestyle can reduce risk of developing depression and improve depressive symptoms.²³

Among older adults this eating pattern is associated with improving cognitive function and reducing risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.²⁴

Weight Maintenance

Macronutrients such as fibre and protein are major contributors to satiety, making us feel fuller for longer.

As the Mediterranean diet contains lots of fibre, protein, and low glycaemic index (GI) foods, maintaining an energy balance or deficit can be easier.⁵

Research has shown strong associations with the Mediterranean diet doubling the likelihood of successful long-term weight loss and maintenance over 2-5 years, with greater adherence to the diet improving results.⁵

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