

What is the Mediterranean diet?



The Mediterranean diet is often said to be one of the healthiest diets, but it also has a reputation of being the best diet for heart health. This booklet will further explain the foods you can eat on the diet, and the overall benefits.

What is it?

The Mediterranean diet is a traditional diet from the Mediterranean basin. It originated in the 50s and 60s although now there's a modern version of the diet that has more red meat and processed food. This is common in all Western countries.

The Mediterranean diet has lots of unprocessed plant-foods and heart-healthy fats from olive oil. It's low in saturated fat because the diet doesn't include a lot of meat. This is a good thing because saturated fat is less healthy.

Overall, the Mediterranean diet fits the foundations of a heart-healthy diet.

Benefits

The diet has been studied for the last 20 years. It's been shown to lower the risk of heart disease in the general population. For people with a high risk of heart disease, there's evidence the Mediterranean diet also helps lower blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

Foods in a Mediterranean diet:

Eat lots:

- Vegetables, especially leafy green vegetables like spinach and silverbeet
- fruit
- nuts and seeds
- grain foods - barley, oats and brown rice
- legumes like chickpeas and lentils
- extra virgin olive oil
- herbs and spices.



Eat some:

- fish and seafood
- dairy products like milk and cheese
- poultry
- eggs



Eat less often or limit:

- red meat
- high sugar foods like soft drink, juice, lollies, biscuits, cakes and lollies
- refined grains like white bread and pasta
- processed meat like sausages and salami.

Mediterranean meal ideas

If you want to follow a Mediterranean diet, these meal ideas are a good place to start. Focus on including whole foods that are close to how they're found in nature and tailor these ideas with foods in season and foods you enjoy. It's best to think about a Mediterranean diet as a 'way of eating' that you can build into your lifestyle instead of a diet.

Breakfast

- Porridge or Bircher muesli topped with plain or Greek yoghurt, nuts, and fruit
- Whole grain toast topped with spinach, avocado, tomato and pesto
- Smoothie made with oats, kale, banana, peanut butter and kiwifruit.

Snacks

- Fruit or vegetables
- Grainy crackers with cheese and hummus
- Plain or Greek yoghurt
- Nuts and seeds

Lunch

- Wholegrain pita bread with spinach, roast chicken, tomatoes and olives
- Cous cous salad with leafy greens, tuna, tomatoes, feta and fresh herbs
- Winter lentil barley and vegetable soup

Dinner

Base dishes around plenty of vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats. Meals can be vegetarian, contain fish and seafood, poultry, eggs or small amounts of red meat.

- Grilled fish wrap with pineapple and tomato salsa
- Falafel
- Chicken and broccoli stir-fry
- Tandoori salmon tray bake
- Roasted seasonal vegetables with chickpeas and spinach
- Roast yam and red onion salad

Is it best for you?

The traditional Mediterranean diet is one of the healthiest eating patterns around for lots of reasons. But when it comes to what we eat there is no single diet that is best for our heart health.

Around the world, lots of diets support a long and healthy life. Examples include:

- the traditional Mediterranean diet
- the vegetarian diet of the Seventh Day Adventists
- the largely plant-based diet of the Okinawans in Japan.

These diets share common themes that support a long and healthy life and have been shown to lower high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Remember

If you want to make positive changes for your heart, then including some dishes and importantly some of the principles underpinning the Mediterranean way of eating will do wonders for your heart health.

Be mindful that the Mediterranean way of eating is not so much a diet but a lifestyle. Multiple factors beyond just the food contribute to its healthiness.

These include an emphasis on activity, mindfully eating with friends and family, preparing food together and socialising over meals.



Patient Information Booklet

Mediterranean Diet

My notes and questions for the doctor:

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