

## Mediterranean Diet Primer and Sample Meal Plan

Rich in flavorful ingredients like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and heart-healthy fats, the Mediterranean diet is equal parts delicious and nutritious.

It's also associated with a variety of benefits and may help support brain function, promote heart health, regulate blood sugar levels, and more.

Although there are no concrete rules for how to follow the Mediterranean diet, there are many general guidelines you can follow to incorporate the principles of the diet into your daily routine.



### What is the Mediterranean diet?

The Mediterranean diet is based on the traditional foods that people used to eat in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, including France, Spain, Greece, and Italy.

Researchers noted that these people were exceptionally healthy and had a low risk of many chronic conditions.

Although there are no strict rules or regulations for the diet, it typically encourages fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and heart-healthy fats. Processed foods, added sugar, and refined grains should be restricted.

### Potential benefits

The Mediterranean diet has been linked to a long list of health benefits.

#### #1. Promotes heart health

The Mediterranean diet has been studied extensively for its ability to promote heart health. In fact, research shows that the Mediterranean diet may even be linked to a lower risk of heart disease and stroke.

One study compared the effects of the Mediterranean diet and a low fat diet and reported that the Mediterranean diet was more effective at slowing the progression of plaque buildup in the arteries, which is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Other research shows that the Mediterranean diet could also help lower levels of diastolic and systolic blood pressure to support heart health.

## #2. Supports healthy blood sugar levels

Following this eating pattern may help stabilize blood sugar levels and protect against type 2 diabetes. Multiple studies have found that the Mediterranean diet can reduce fasting blood sugar levels and improve levels of hemoglobin A1C, a marker used to measure long-term blood sugar control.

The Mediterranean diet has also been shown to decrease insulin resistance, a condition that impairs the body's ability to use insulin to regulate blood sugar levels effectively.

## #3. Protects brain function

Several studies show that the Mediterranean diet could be beneficial for brain health and may even protect against cognitive decline as you get older. One study including 512 people found that greater adherence to the Mediterranean diet was associated with improved memory and reductions in several risk factors for Alzheimer's disease.

Other research has found that the Mediterranean diet may be tied to a lower risk of dementia, cognitive impairment, and Alzheimer's disease. What's more, one large review also showed that following the Mediterranean diet was linked to improvements in cognitive function, memory, attention, and processing speed in healthy older adults.

## Foods to eat

The diet examined by most studies is high in healthy plant foods and relatively low in animal products and meat. However, eating fish and seafood is recommended at least twice a week.

You can include a mix of fresh, frozen, dried, and canned fruits and vegetables, but check package labels for added sugar and sodium.

Ideally, you should base your diet on these healthy Mediterranean foods:

- **Vegetables:** tomatoes, broccoli, kale, spinach, onions, cauliflower, carrots, Brussels sprouts, cucumbers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips
- **Fruits:** apples, bananas, oranges, pears, strawberries, grapes, figs, melons, peaches, and dates
- **Nuts, seeds, and nut butters:** almonds, walnuts, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, cashews, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, almond butter, peanut butter
- **Legumes:** beans, peas, lentils, pulses, peanuts, chickpeas
- **Whole grains:** oats, brown rice, rye, barley, corn, buckwheat, whole grain bread and pasta (avoid gluten whenever possible)
- **Fish and seafood:** salmon, sardines, trout, tuna, mackerel, shrimp, oysters, clams, crab, mussels
- **Poultry:** chicken, duck, turkey
- **Eggs:** chicken, quail, and duck eggs (if you don't have an egg sensitivity)

- **Dairy:** cheese, yogurt, milk (dairy should be consumed in moderation or not at all if you have a lactose sensitivity)
- **Herbs and spices:** garlic, basil, mint, rosemary, sage, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper
- **Healthy fats:** extra virgin olive oil, olives, avocados, and avocado oil

## Foods to limit

You should limit these processed foods and ingredients when following the Mediterranean diet:

- **Added sugar:** added sugar is found in many foods but especially high in soda, candies, ice cream, table sugar, syrup, and baked goods
- **Refined grains:** white bread, pasta, tortillas, chips, crackers
- **Trans fats:** found in margarine, fried foods, and other processed foods
- **Refined oils:** soybean oil, canola oil, cottonseed oil, grapeseed oil
- **Processed meat:** processed sausages, hot dogs, deli meats, beef jerky
- **Highly processed foods:** fast food, convenience meals, microwave popcorn, granola bars



## What to drink

Water should be your go-to beverage on a Mediterranean diet.

This diet also includes moderate amounts of red wine — around one glass per day. However, this is completely optional, and wine should be avoided by some people including, anyone who is pregnant, has difficulty drinking in moderation, or is taking certain medications that may interact with alcohol.

Coffee and tea are also healthy beverage choices on the Mediterranean diet as long as it's without a lot of sugar or cream.

You'll want to limit sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda or sweet tea, which are very high in added sugar. Fruit juice may be used as a sweetener, but you're better off choosing whole fruits to get the benefit of fiber.

## Sample menu

Below is a sample menu for 1 week of meals on the Mediterranean diet. Feel free to adjust the portions and food choices based on your own needs and preferences.

### Monday

- **Breakfast:** Greek yogurt with strawberries and chia seeds
- **Lunch:** a gluten free wrap with hummus and vegetables
- **Dinner:** a tuna salad with greens and olive oil, as well as a fruit salad

### Tuesday

- **Breakfast:** oatmeal with blueberries
- **Lunch:** caprese zucchini noodles with mozzarella, cherry tomatoes, olive oil, and balsamic vinegar
- **Dinner:** a salad with tomatoes, olives, cucumbers, farro, grilled chicken, and feta cheese

### Wednesday

- **Breakfast:** an omelet with mushrooms, tomatoes, and onions
- **Lunch:** a large spinach salad with goat cheese and fresh vegetables
- **Dinner:** Mediterranean lasagna

### Thursday

- **Breakfast:** yogurt with sliced fruit and nuts
- **Lunch:** a quinoa salad with chickpeas
- **Dinner:** broiled salmon with brown rice and vegetables

### Friday

- **Breakfast:** eggs and sautéed vegetables with whole wheat toast
- **Lunch:** stuffed zucchini boats with pesto, turkey sausage, tomatoes, bell peppers, and cheese
- **Dinner:** grilled lamb with salad and baked potato

### Saturday

- **Breakfast:** oatmeal with raisins, nuts, and apple slices
- **Lunch:** a whole grain wrap with vegetables
- **Dinner:** Mediterranean pizza made with pita bread and topped with cheese, vegetables, and olives

### Sunday

- **Breakfast:** an omelet with veggies and olives
- **Lunch:** falafel bowl with feta, onions, tomatoes, hummus, and rice
- **Dinner:** grilled chicken with vegetables, sweet potato fries, and fresh fruit

Here's a list of [21 healthy Mediterranean recipes](#).

### Healthy snacks

Although longevity research shows better results when you don't snack between meals, here are some healthy snack options you can enjoy on the Mediterranean diet when you just really need a snack.

- a handful of nuts
- a piece of fruit
- baby carrots with hummus
- mixed berries
- grapes
- Greek yogurt
- hard-boiled egg with salt and pepper
- apple slices with almond butter
- sliced bell peppers with guacamole
- cottage cheese with fresh fruit
- chia pudding

### Dining out

Choose whole grains, vegetables, legumes, seafood, and healthy fat when eating out.

Here are a few tips to help adapt dishes when you're eating out:

1. Choose fish or seafood as your main dish.
2. Ask the server if your food can be cooked in extra virgin olive oil.
3. Choose whole grain bread, with olive oil instead of butter.
4. Add vegetables to your order.

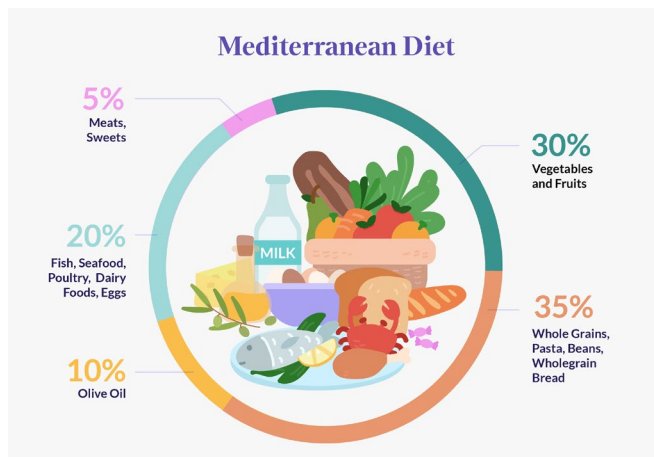
These [tips for eating healthy at restaurants](#) may also be helpful.

## Shopping list

It's always a good idea to shop at the perimeter of the store, which is where the whole foods are typically found. Opt for nutrient-dense foods as much as possible, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains.

Here are some basic Mediterranean diet items to add to your shopping list:

- **Vegetables:** carrots, onions, broccoli, spinach, kale, garlic, zucchini, mushrooms
- **Frozen veggies:** peas, carrots, broccoli, mixed vegetables
- **Tubers:** potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams
- **Fruits:** apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, melons, peaches, pears, strawberries, blueberries
- **Grains:** whole grain, gluten free bread and pasta, quinoa, brown rice, oats
- **Legumes:** lentils, chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans
- **Nuts:** almonds, walnuts, cashews, pistachios, macadamia nuts
- **Seeds:** sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds
- **Condiments:** sea salt, pepper, turmeric, cinnamon, cayenne pepper, oregano
- **Seafood:** salmon, sardines, mackerel, trout, shrimp, mussels
- **Dairy products:** Greek yogurt, yogurt, milk
- **Poultry:** chicken, duck, turkey
- **Eggs:** chicken, quail, and duck eggs
- **Healthy fats:** extra virgin olive oil, olives, avocados, avocado oil



Keep in mind that there is no one size fits all nutrition template. Please take these recommendations in context to your personal biology.

Many people find eating gluten, dairy, and legumes inflammatory.

The best idea is to eat a diet rich in whole foods, not too much at a time, and combine with other longevity practices like exercise, prioritizing sleep, and managing stress.