

## The Mediterranean diet

### What is the Mediterranean diet?

The Mediterranean diet is the traditional eating pattern of people from countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. These include Greece, Italy and Spain.

This diet is based on healthy whole foods and includes very few processed foods.

Key foods in a Mediterranean diet are:

- extra virgin olive oil
- vegetables and fruits
- wholegrain breads and cereals
- legumes or beans.

Yoghurt, cheese and lean protein sources such as fish, chicken or eggs are also eaten. Red and processed meats and sweets are only eaten in small amounts. Wine (especially red wine) is also a traditional part of this diet. Wine is only consumed in small amounts and with meals. Onion, garlic and other herbs and spices are used to add flavour to foods and dishes.

Following a Mediterranean diet is not just about what foods are eaten but also about *how* they are eaten. Cooking at home is encouraged and ideally meals

should be shared with friends or family. Meals and snacks should be eaten 'mindfully'. This means eating without distractions (for example, not in front of the TV or your desk) and eating slowly so that the taste and flavour can be appreciated.

### Why is this diet healthy?

The healthy food combinations in the Mediterranean diet have anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. This can contribute to prevention and treatment of a range of chronic diseases.

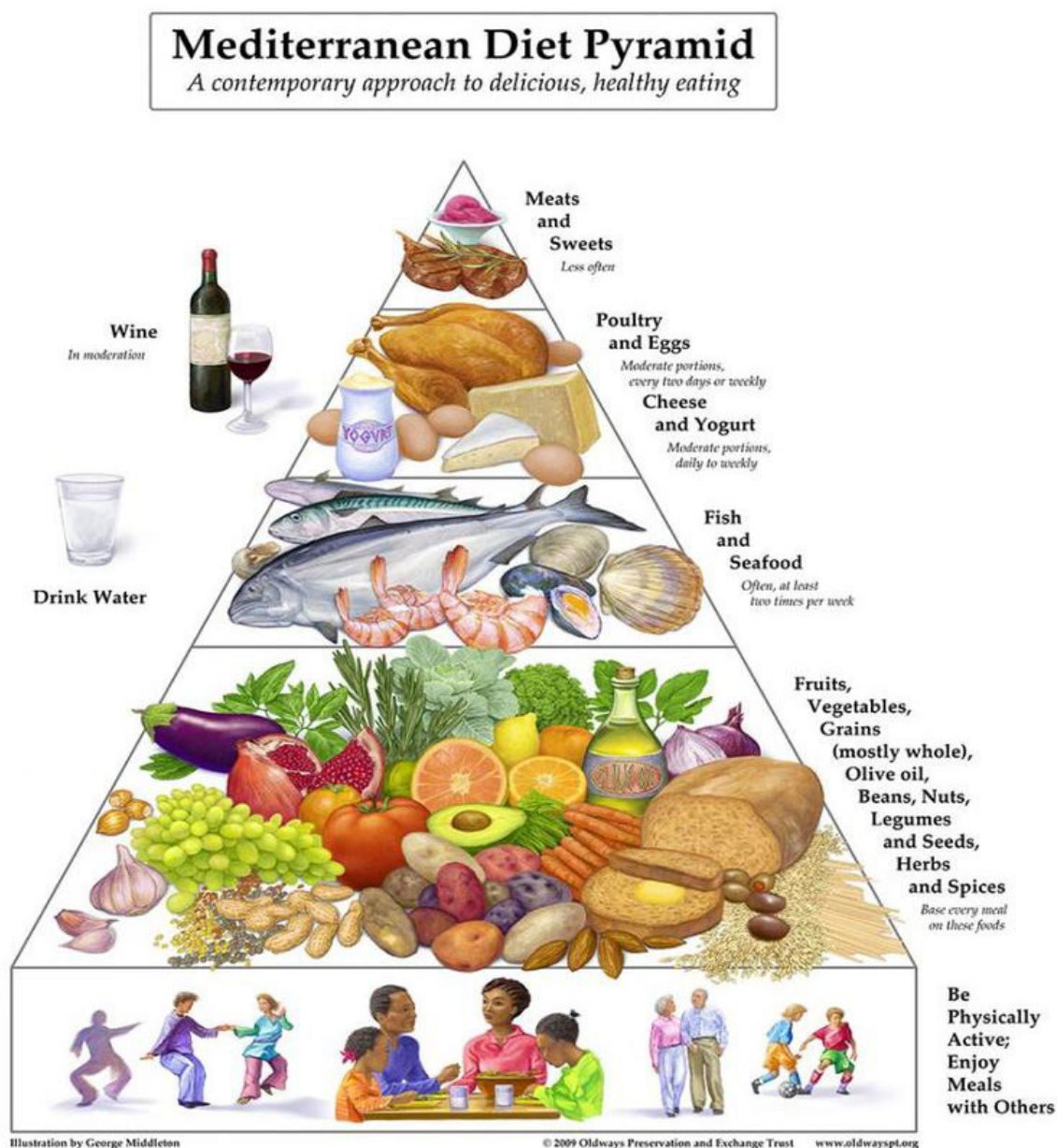
Research shows that the Mediterranean diet may have health benefits and reduce risk of developing:

- heart disease, including heart attack
- type 2 diabetes or its complications
- some cancers, including bowel cancer
- fatty liver disease
- depression or improving its symptoms
- cognitive decline, including dementia.

Importantly, the benefits are related to following the Mediterranean dietary pattern as a whole, and not individual foods or nutrients.

## What does a Mediterranean diet look like?

This food pyramid shows the foods and drinks of the Mediterranean diet. At the base of the pyramid are foods which should be eaten most. At the top are foods to be eaten in small amounts or less frequently. Enjoying meals with others and being active is also highlighted. If you have liver disease it is best to discuss any alcohol intake with your hepatologist or gastroenterologist.



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## What and how much should I be eating to follow a Mediterranean diet?

Food group	Serving size	Servings per day or per week
Vegetables	1 cup salad / ½ cup cooked / 75 g	6 serves per day (or more) <i>Include leafy greens and tomatoes daily</i>
Wholegrain breads / cereals / rice / pasta	30 g of cereal / 1 wrap / ½ pita / ½ cup cooked rice or pasta	4-6 servings per day
Extra Virgin Olive Oil <i>Choose Australian certified</i>	1 tablespoon / 20 mL	2-4 tablespoons per day
Fruit	1 whole piece / 1 cup diced / 1½ tablespoons dried	2-3 serves per day (2 serves fresh)
Potatoes	1 medium potato	1 serve per day (or less) <i>Does not include chips/fries</i>
Nuts (unsalted)	1 handful / 30 g	3 serves per week (or more)
Legumes (canned or dry)	1 cup / 150 g	3 serves per week (or more)
Fish	100-150 g	3 serves per week, at least 1 oily (e.g. Salmon)
Eggs	1 egg / 50-60 g	4 serves per week (or less)
Cheese (Feta, Ricotta or Cottage)	2 thick slices / 40 g	2-4 serves per week
Yoghurt (unsweetened)	1 small tub (120-200 g) / ½ cup	4-6 serves per week
Milk (low fat)	1 cup	½ -1 serve per day
Poultry (chicken or turkey)	100-150 g	1-3 serves per week
Sweet /savoury snacks	30 g chocolate / small packet chips / 2 biscuits	3 serves per week (or less)
Red Meat (beef, lamb or pork)	Palm size / 80-100 g	1 serve per week (or less)
Water	6-8 250 mL glasses per day	Should be the main drink
Red wine (if you choose to drink)	100 mL / 1 standard drink	1-2 glasses per day <i>with meals and no more than 10 per week</i>

This table is a guide. A Dietitian can help you determine how many serves is right for you.

## Meal and Snack Ideas

### BREAKFAST options

- Porridge: rolled oats made with milk/water, with fruit, honey and/or nuts
- Natural Greek style yoghurt with fruit, nuts or untoasted muesli, and honey
- Wholegrain breakfast cereal (e.g. Weetbix, Vitabrits, All Bran, Sultana Bran) with milk/yoghurt
- Toast (wholemeal or multigrain) with extra virgin olive oil and ricotta/cottage/feta cheese OR poached/boiled/scrambled egg OR grilled tomato and herbs OR baked beans

### LUNCH options

- Salad, including tomato and a dark leafy green such as spinach and canned beans or legumes, with extra virgin olive oil
- Sandwiches/wraps – wholemeal bread, roll, wrap or pita with salad. Use canned fish, beans, hummus or chicken breast as a filling. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil
- Wholemeal pasta with vegetables and extra virgin olive oil or tomato based sauce. Try replacing meat with canned lentils or beans.

### DINNER options

- Vegetable soup, including chickpeas/lentils with vegetables, canned tomatoes and onion.
- Chicken breast: stir-fry, baked or grilled in extra virgin olive oil and mixed herbs with salad or vegetables and wholemeal bread or rice
- Homemade pizzas, with a wholemeal bread base and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil. Try vegetable toppings such as onion, eggplant and zucchini
- Small portion of lean beef, lamb, veal or kangaroo: stir-fry, baked or grilled in extra virgin olive oil with salad or vegetables and canned beans/lentils.
- Optional extra: 1 small glass of red wine *with your meal*

### SNACKS

- Handful of nuts and/or seeds
- Fruit (fresh, canned or dried)
- Fresh vegetable sticks with hummus or tzatziki
- Natural Greek style yoghurt
- Wholemeal crusty bread dipped in extra virgin olive oil/pesto
- Avocado on toast or wholegrain crackers (with extra virgin olive oil)
- Boiled egg OR feta/ricotta cheese on a slice of wholemeal bread or crackers

*Acknowledgement: the included food, meal and snack recommendations were adapted based on materials developed for the LIFE, MedLey, AUSMED and MEDINA Mediterranean diet research studies in Australia*

## Meal preparation and food choices

Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO):

- Replace canola, sesame, coconut or other vegetable oils with EVOO in cooking and dressings.
- Instead of spreading margarine or butter on bread try drizzling EVOO.
- Have an EVOO bottle handy at work to use for dressing salads.

Vegetables and salad:

- Replace meat with more vegetables in your meals. They should take up at least half your plate!
- Include Mediterranean vegetables in your cooking (e.g. tomato, eggplant, zucchini, onion and garlic) and in salads (e.g. olives, tomatoes, capsicum, onion, spinach or legumes).

Healthy protein sources:

- Try legumes. If having mince, replace half with beans or lentils.
- Include fish (especially oily fish like salmon) instead of steak or chops.
- Switch red meats for white meats.
- Add nuts to salads.

Eating out:

- Choose meals with lots of vegetables. Order fresh salads, healthy pastas with vegetables, baked and grilled

fish/poultry with vegetables, or vegetable soups.

- Choose dishes with fish, white meat (chicken or turkey), or vegetarian options.
- Order a side of salad or vegetables instead of potato chips.
- Skip dessert or have a fruit based dessert.

## Useful Mediterranean diet resources

Websites:

### Oldways

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

### Mediterranean Living

<https://www.mediterraneanliving.com/>

Books:

### The Mediterranean Diet

<https://www.panmacmillan.com.au/9781742610825/>

### Cookbooks by 'Two Greek Girls Cooking'

<https://twogreekgirls.com/cook-book/>

Article:

### The real Mediterranean diet: What you can expect

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2017-02-16/10-commandments-of-the-real-mediterranean-diet/7541786>