



What is the Mediterranean Diet?

The Mediterranean Diet is a lifestyle based upon the traditional foods and drinks of the countries that surround the Mediterranean Sea. Hundreds of scientific studies conducted over the last 60 years demonstrate that the Mediterranean Diet is one of the healthiest ways to eat in the world.

Egg Nutrition Center



Unlike restrictive diets that you “go on,” following a Mediterranean Diet means cooking and enjoying delicious meals with friends and family as part of a regular healthy lifestyle. It means cooking with whole, minimally-processed ingredients, and balancing meals with physical activity. It is easy and affordable to take advantage of the Mediterranean Diet’s wide-range of health benefits and delicious flavors because your local grocery store has everything you need.



The Mediterranean Diet encompasses healthy cooking and eating habits, including:

- Enjoying plenty of vegetables. Vegetables are a foundational food for all meals in the Mediterranean Diet.
- Having breakfast every day. Starting the day with fiber-rich foods like fruit and whole grains combined with a high-quality protein such as that from eggs or dairy products, will help keep you feeling full longer.
- Using good fats like extra-virgin olive oil, nuts, sunflower seeds, olives, and avocados.
- Eating seafood twice a week. Fish and shellfish such as tuna, herring, salmon, sardines, and shrimp offer omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to have benefits for heart and brain health.
- Enjoying nutrient-rich dairy and eggs throughout the week.
- Cooking meatless meals once or more per week.
- Watching portion sizes of meat. Small strips of sirloin added to a vegetable sauté, or a pasta dish garnished with diced prosciutto offers lots of flavor without oversized portions of meat. As a main course, 3 ounces or less of chicken or lean meat is a portion.
- Saving sweets for special occasions.

Everything matters

Whenever scientists research any single food from the Mediterranean Diet, such as olive oil, or a particular nut or fish, they find that the greatest health benefits are connected to overall adherence to a Mediterranean Diet, and cannot be tied to a particular ingredient. In short, there is no single magic key to good health. Eating a variety of whole and minimally processed foods and staying physically active are the most important principles of the Mediterranean Diet.

Mediterranean Diet meals are centered around a variety of foods from the base of the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, herbs, spices, nuts, and healthy fats like those found in olive oil. Additionally, the Mediterranean Diet embraces consumption of seafood, which offers omega-3 fatty acids. Eggs, poultry, yogurt, and cheese are also authentic Mediterranean foods that are enjoyed in moderation. Red meats and sweets are reserved for special occasions. Water and wine are the typical beverages of the Mediterranean Diet. Water is consumed throughout the day and a 5 ounce glass of wine is enjoyed in moderation, meaning up to one glass per day for women or two for men.

Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

A contemporary approach to delicious, healthy eating

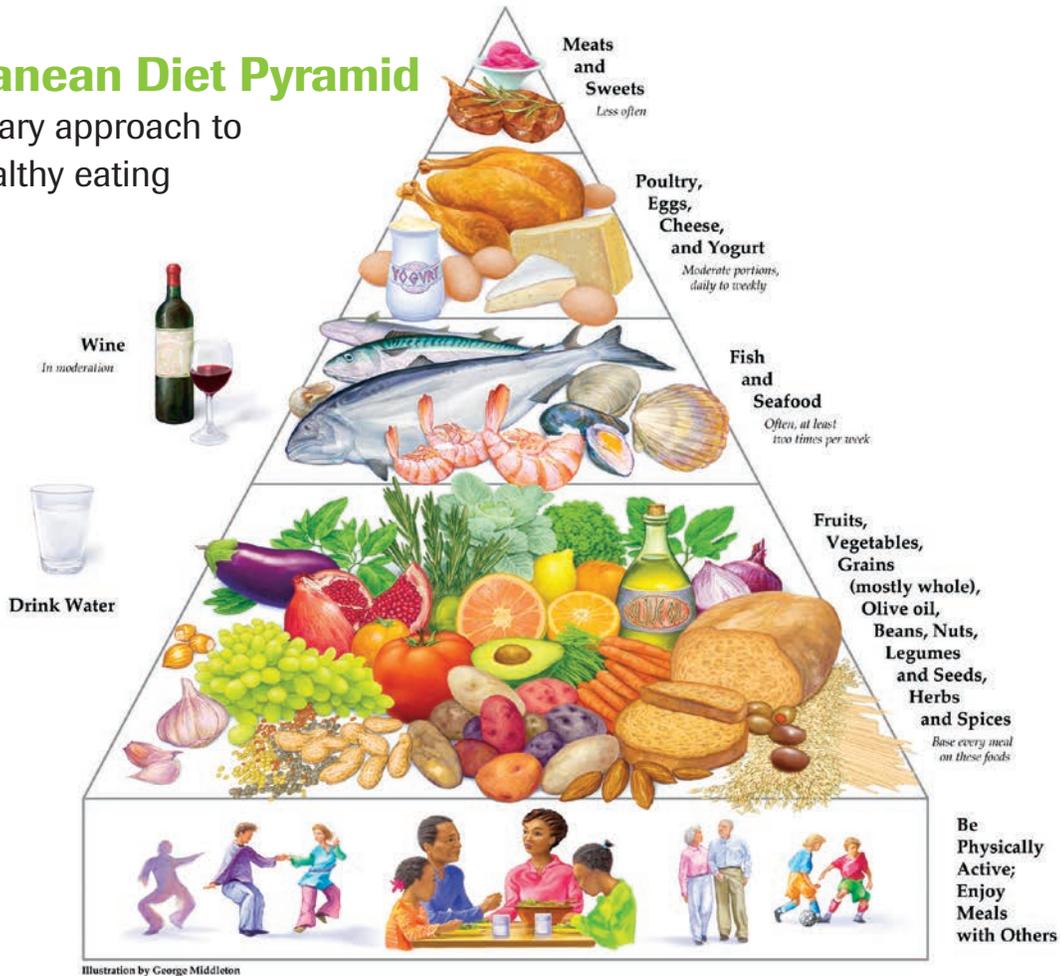


Illustration by George Middleton

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NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

An impressive amount of scientific research over the last several decades points to the Mediterranean Diet's magnificent nutritional benefits, making the Mediterranean Diet one of the most widely studied—and widely lauded—ways of eating.

Research indicates that the Mediterranean Diet is associated with:

- Reduced risk for heart disease and stroke.
- Reduced risk for type 2 diabetes.
- Blood sugar management in patients with type 2 diabetes.
- Reduced inflammation and higher circulating levels of antioxidants.
- Decreased likelihood of developing depressive symptoms in older age.
- Slower mental decline with age and decreased risk for Alzheimer's disease.
- Improved bone health.
- Reduced risk for some types of cancer.
- Improvement of sleep apnea symptoms.
- Overall higher quality of life including better physical and mental health.



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Eggs and the Traditional Mediterranean Diet

Eggs have played a supporting role in the Mediterranean Diet for thousands of years. Ancient Phoenicians who lived in the Mediterranean region three thousand years ago kept chickens among their barnyard animals. An ancient mosaic style known as “Unswept Floor,” popular in the 2nd century BC, depicts food remnants from Roman banquets, including egg shells, indicating the use of eggs at even the finest of meals.

One of the earliest known cookbooks, *De Re Coquinaria* (“On the Subject of Cooking”) by Apicius from 4th or 5th-century Rome, includes a wide range of dishes similar to today’s quiches and custards, where eggs are used to bind together vegetables, berries, fish, nuts, and other popular ingredients.

It is no wonder eggs were widely appreciated. At a time without refrigeration, chickens were the gift that kept on giving, offering their regular and predictable bounty of fresh eggs without any need for slaughter. The prevalence of chickens meant a ready supply of eggs for use in everyday cooking and during special occasions for the many cultures that have called the Mediterranean home.



Throughout history and throughout the Mediterranean region, from Turkey to Morocco, from Portugal to Greece, eggs have appeared as ingredients in both simple and complex dishes, providing richness of flavor and contributing nutrients. Eggs are used in soups, stews and porridges, in pastas, sauces, breads and cakes, and even in drinks.

The use of eggs in regional cuisine has persisted all the way to today. Eggs make star appearances in dishes such as omelets (like the Arab eggah, Italian frittata, and Spanish tortilla), salade Niçoise from Provence, and the Greek chicken soup with egg-lemon sauce known as avgolemono. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa people enjoy shakshuka, poached eggs in tomato sauce. Eggs also appear as appetizers throughout the region, and in sweet custards to celebrate special occasions.

Packed with a number of nutrients, eggs have always been an important part of Mediterranean cuisine. They are enjoyed in tandem with fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, nuts, oils, seafood and meat, and fragrant spices. Try making some of the dishes mentioned above to discover how well the traditional foods of the Mediterranean fit into today’s tastes and lifestyles.

Information provided by the non-profit educational organization Oldways and its Mediterranean Foods Alliance, in collaboration with the Egg Nutrition Center.