

Introduction

Unlike the “brand name” diets with a corresponding book written by a nutritionist or medical professional, the term “Mediterranean diet” is a generic term based on the traditional eating habits in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Eating styles vary among these countries, but there are some common components which we’ll outline below. It sounds great at first glance, “I get to eat all the pizza and pasta I want and still be healthy?!” Well, unfortunately, that is not what the plan purports. But, don’t worry, you’ll be eating delicious, whole food with color, flavor, zest, and variety.

However, just because there isn’t a single book that has sold a million copies doesn’t mean it is not well-regarded. In fact, the Mediterranean Diet has consistently ranked among the top 1 or 2 diet plans (along with the Dash Diet, further outlined in this magazine) for overall nutrition, weight-loss, and health. In 2021, the US News & World Report ranked Mediterranean & Dash tied for #1 in the category of Best Diet overall. (See <https://health.usnews.com/best-diet/best-diets-overall>)

What is the Mediterranean Diet?

A Mediterranean-style diet can help you achieve the American Heart Association’s recommendations for a healthy dietary pattern that:

- **Emphasizes** vegetables, fruits, whole grains, potatoes, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes, with olive oil as a primary fat source;
- **Includes** low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, non-tropical vegetable oils and nuts in low to moderate amounts;
- **Limits** added sugars, sugary beverages, sodium, highly processed foods, refined carbohydrates, saturated fats, and fatty or processed meats. This is consistent with all the dietary plans we are recommending for optimal health and wellness.
- **Reduces** red meat and focuses on fish and poultry. It also centers on minimally processed, plant-based foods. Wine may be consumed in low to moderate amounts, usually with meals. Fruit is a common dessert instead of sweets.

This is possibly the best overall diet for most people because it is the least restrictive while leaving you feeling great since it is balanced with robust flavorful and colorful foods. The Mediterranean Diet is a lifestyle, not a rigid calorie-counting or “tracking every gram” plan. This diet focuses on eliminating processed foods like all the others we recommend but has no strict prohibitions (like the Keto or Whole30 dietary plans).

Why should I try the Mediterranean Diet?

What is the catalyst in your life that will be the thing that you need happen to change your health and wellness for the good? Have you ever said to yourself, “Oh, it doesn’t really matter what I eat right now, I’m too old to change... Oh, I’ve tried every diet out there and can’t lose a pound so what’s the point?” Do you ever think “I. Just. Can’t.”? I’m here to tell you that you can. You can commit to a dietary plan, implement it to your daily life, and see *real* results. Don’t wait until you visit a medical practitioner and they give you the ominous news that you now have high blood pressure, metabolic disease, fatty liver syndrome, diabetes, or clogged arteries and are going to need a stent put in your heart. If that type of wake-up call has already happened to you – you’re reading this, good for you - you’re ready to do something to reverse that trend. If you are on the precipice looking over a cliff and wondering if you should jump into healthy living, you should! The Mediterranean Diet is recommended for heart health, reduction of stroke risk, reduction of blood sugar, and even Alzheimers’ risk reduction.

What can I eat and what can’t I eat?

You may enjoy the following:

- **Vegetables:** Tomatoes, broccoli, [kale](#), spinach, onions, cauliflower, carrots, Brussels sprouts, cucumbers, etc.
- **Fruits:** Apples, bananas, oranges, pears, strawberries, grapes, [dates](#), figs, melons, peaches, etc.
- **Nuts and seeds:** Almonds, [walnuts](#), macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, cashews, chia seeds, flax seeds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.
- **Legumes:** Beans, peas, lentils, peanuts, chickpeas, etc. (Avoid sweetened, canned, baked beans)
- **Tubers:** Potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips, yams, etc.
- **Whole grains:** Whole rolled or steel-cut oats, brown rice, rye, barley, corn, buckwheat, whole wheat, farro, millet, whole-grain bread and pasta.
- **Fish and seafood:** [Salmon](#), sardines, trout, tuna, mackerel, shrimp, oysters, clams, crab, mussels, etc.
- **Poultry:** Chicken, duck, turkey, etc.
- **Eggs:** Chicken, quail and duck eggs.
- **Dairy:** Cheese, yogurt, Greek yogurt, etc.
- **Herbs and spices:** [Garlic](#), basil, mint, rosemary, sage, nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, etc.
- **Healthy Fats:** Extra virgin olive oil, olives, [avocados](#), coconut oil, and [avocado oil](#).
- **Water, coffee, tea, 1 glass of wine per day maximum**

You should avoid or limit the following:

- **Added sugar:** Soda, candies, ice cream, table sugar, honey, molasses, artificial sweeteners, juice, sweetened beverages, and most desserts.
- **Refined grains:** White bread, pasta made with refined wheat, buns, crackers, and baked goods.
- **Trans fats:** Found in [margarine](#), Crisco, processed baked goods, and fried foods.
- **Refined oils:** Soybean oil, vegetable oil, [canola oil](#), cottonseed oil and others.
- **Processed meat:** Processed deli lunch meat, sausages, hot dogs, etc
- **Highly processed foods:** Anything labeled "low-fat" or "diet" or which looks like it was made in a factory. Most packaged foods that are not whole-foods. Look for packages which only have ingredients you can pronounce and understand what you are eating!
- **High-sugar** dairy items such as sweetened yogurt, milk, frozen desserts, etc
- **Most snack foods:** Chips, fried food, breaded food, granola bars, etc

Set yourself up for success

As with all new dietary plans, you set yourself up for success by shopping for all your nutritious foods and ingredients and eliminating the temptation foods from your home. If you have a weakness for a muffin or candy bar in the afternoon, set yourself up for success by having your veggies and dip and a handful of nuts close by when your craving hits rather than the candy or muffin. It also helps to have recipes selected in advance of going shopping so you know what ingredients you'll need on hand to prepare your meals all week. It will be challenging to stick to any dietary plan if you don't have the ingredients handy – especially the vegetables, good quality meats, and even fruits since those can spoil quickly. So be prepared that you might need to go to the grocery store more frequently at first until your dietary plan becomes your lifestyle.

Sample recipes

Breakfast

- **Overnight Oatmeal**

Serving size 1. Can be easily doubled or tripled for families

- ½ cup rolled oats OR quick oats
- ⅔ cup almond or nut/soy milk
- ½ cup unsweetened Greek yogurt
- 1 Tb Chia seeds
- 1 Tb honey or 1 tsp stevia or whatever you want to sweeten it
- 1 pinch of salt
- Fresh or frozen blueberries, pecans, or any berries and nuts you'd like!

In an individual food storage container (or mason jar), add the ingredients in the order listed (except for toppings) and stir. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

In the morning, stir up the mixture; it should be thick and the oats should be completely soft. Add the toppings of your choice. Repeat every day if necessary!

The different varieties of oats affect the texture, so if you like a thicker, chewier texture go for rolled oats and if you prefer something softer and creamier, go for quick cooking oats.

- **Spinach, Feta, and Artichoke Breakfast Bake**

Serving size 6

- 2 cups fresh baby spinach leaves
- ½ cup green onions, finely chopped
- ¾ cup chopped artichokes (from canned), drained and patted dry
- ⅓ cup diced red pepper
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill or ½ tsp dried dill, chopped
- 8 large eggs
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
- 1 ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 375°F. Spray a 9 x 13 baking dish with oil.

In a small bowl combine spinach, scallions, artichoke, red pepper, garlic and dill. Pour into the casserole dish spreading evenly. In another bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, parmesan, salt and pepper. Mix in feta cheese and pour over vegetables. Bake 32-35 and then let sit for 8-10 minutes to firm up and cool before serving.

Lunch

- **Butternut Squash Soup**

Serves 3-4 for dinner portions; 4-6 for lunch portions

- 1 large uncooked butternut squash
- 1 Tb olive oil
- ½ cup chopped yellow or white onion
- 1 cup celery, chopped to bite-size/thin slices/pieces
- salt, pepper, and garlic powder to taste
- ½ cup half and half or heavy whipping cream
- ½ tsp ginger (dried)

Cut the squash in half, scoop out seeds. Put each half face-up on a cookie sheet or metal baking pan and spread olive oil on it. Sprinkle generously with salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Roast in a preheated 350 degree oven until very soft, about 1 hour. While roasting, sauté onion and celery in olive oil about 5 minutes. Turn off heat. Scoop flesh out of squash skin and add to sautéed pan on stovetop. Add cream and blend with immersion blender until pureed. Add ginger and any other seasonings or s & p to taste and heat through (but do not boil) and serve with Greek yogurt garnish.

- **Luminaries Asian Slaw**

Serves 4-5 for lunch portions

7 tablespoons rice wine vinegar (sub apple cider vinegar)
4 tablespoons sesame oil (sub grapeseed or olive oil)
5 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
3 tablespoons liquid aminos (sub soy sauce)
3 tablespoons stevia (sub honey)
2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger root or 2 tsp ginger powder
1 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic or 2 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp onion powder
1 tsp siracha or hot sauce
5 cups thinly sliced green cabbage
2 cups thinly sliced red cabbage
2 cups shredded napa cabbage
2 carrots, julienned
(the veggies could be substituted with one large bag of multi-colored cole slaw mix)
2 red bell peppers, thinly sliced or chopped
6 green onions, chopped
3/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

To make a meal out of it, put 1 cut up rotisserie chicken or for a vegan option, use chickpeas or tofu

Directions

In a medium bowl, whisk together the rice vinegar, oil, peanut butter, liquid aminos/soy sauce, brown sugar/stevia, ginger, garlic, and other spices.

In a large bowl, mix the green cabbage, red cabbage, napa cabbage, red bell peppers, carrots, green onions, and cilantro. Toss with the peanut butter mixture and chicken (optional) just before serving.

Dinner

- **Luminaries Chicken Curry over Millet**

Serves 4

2 lbs cooked diced chicken breast
1 onion, chopped or diced
1 green pepper, diced
1 Tbsp minced fresh garlic
3 Tb avocado oil, divided
1 cans full-fat or lite coconut milk
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 Tb curry powder (or amount to taste depending on the strength of your curry powder)
1 cup dried millet (or farro, or barley, or quinoa) cooked to package instructions

Sauté chicken in avocado oil until soft. Remove from pan and also sauté veggies in avocado oil until soft. Add coconut milk, lemon juice, curry, and chicken and simmer until heated through/flavors mixed.

Serve over bed of brown rice, or millet cooked to package specifications (replace cooking water with chicken broth for extra deliciousness).

Dessert

- **Luminaries Black Bean Brownies (blender required)**

Serves 6

5 eggs
2 cans black beans, rinsed
1/4 cup unsweetened almond milk
Blend above ingredients really well in a blender till beans are puréed.

Add to blender:

1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
3/4 cup Truvia (stevia) Baking Blend or other natural sugar substitute
1/2 tsp baking soda
1/4 tsp salt

3 Tb coconut oil

Blend all ingredients well and pour into greased 9x13" pan & bake at 375 for 25-30 min or until lightly firm & springy. This recipe requires a high-speed, powerful blender to ensure the beans get pureed.