



## THE MEDITERRANEAN WAY

- A Mediterranean diet is one rich in beans, legumes, fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Fish, nuts and low fat dairy products are also a regular part of this type of diet, whereas meats, sugars, and high fat dairy foods are included only occasionally. It is important to remember that although this diet may be higher in total fat, it is low in saturated fats with no hydrogenated fat sources (also known as trans fats).
- The Lyon Heart Study demonstrated that a Mediterranean-type diet compared with a regular diet can reduce the rate of recurrence of heart attacks by 50- 70%.
- The Mediterranean lifestyle not only includes a healthy diet but also regular physical activity which promotes a healthy weight, and overall fitness and well-being.

## THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET PATTERN

The Mediterranean region consists of a least 16 countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. Historically this region was found to have especially low levels of heart disease and high adult life expectancy. The Lyon Heart Study was conducted to provide further understanding of the benefits of a Mediterranean eating pattern. The Lyon Heart Study used a westernized version of the traditional Mediterranean diet that also incorporated basic American Heart Association Guidelines. These guidelines are also consistent with the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) emphasis on whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy, small portions of lean meats, and inclusion of nuts and dried beans. DASH guidelines have been found to significantly improve blood pressure and reduce high blood cholesterol levels.

## EAT A DIET RICH IN VEGETABLES, FRUITS, BEANS, AND WHOLE GRAINS.

Independent of a diet low in saturated fat, a diet high in fiber plays an important role in the prevention of coronary heart disease. The antioxidant and phytochemical properties of plant foods are also likely contributors to this diet's beneficial effects.

The whole grain included the bran, germ and endosperm. When grains are refined the bran and the germ are removed, thus removing the beneficial fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals which are thought to provide health promoting benefits. Refined grains leave only the endosperm which provides only the carbohydrate calories. Examples of whole grains are breads, pasta or cereals made from whole wheat flour, shredded wheat, oatmeal, pearled barley, quinoa, millet, brown rice, or wild grain rice.

**Low fat dairy foods** are included daily. The calcium in dairy foods helps keep blood pressure low. New research also suggests that including low fat dairy foods in a calorie controlled diet may actually make weight loss easier.

**Poultry and fish** are consumed a few times per week, with fish being the preferred choice. The American Heart Association recommends eating fatty fish 2 times a week for the beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. The best sources include: salmon, blue fish, tuna (even the canned type) and mackerel. These beneficial omega-3 fats are also found in flax seed oil, canola oil, and walnuts.

**Fat in the diet:** The Lyon Heart Study Diet provided about 30% of calories from fats. While traditional Mediterranean diets used primarily olive oil, a monounsaturated fat, the Lyon Heart Study used more canola oil which contains both monounsaturated fat and some of the polyunsaturated Omega-3 fats. Traditional Mediterranean diets did not include margarine or other processed foods, thus avoiding hydrogenated oils/trans fats.

Due to its saturated fat content, beef and pork are limited to a couple of times a month. Traditionally only 1-2 ounces of meat were eaten in a primarily plant based diet. It was considered a condiment rather than an entrée.

## CHOOSING FATS WISELY:

DANGEROUS FATS	HEALTHY FATS
<p><b>Saturated Fats</b> are often solid at room temperature. Saturated fat is found in all types of meat, butter, whole milk dairy foods, cheese, ice cream and tropical plant oils such as coconut or palm oil. Aim for no more than 10 grams of saturated fat each day, less is better.</p> <p><b>Hydrogenated Fats</b> are listed in the ingredients sections of food labels as “partially hydrogenated oil”. Also known as trans fats, this type of fat is found in margarine, shortening and other processed foods such as snack cakes and fried foods. Traditional Mediterranean diets did not include margarine or processed foods, thus avoiding hydrogenated oils/trans fats.</p>	<p><b>Monounsaturated fats</b> can help protect your “good” HDL cholesterol levels. Monounsaturated fats include olive oil, canola oil, and nuts. Use in moderation to avoid excess calories.</p> <p><b>Omega –3</b> fats are one type of beneficial polyunsaturated fat that is found in fish, canola oil, walnuts, and flax seed. Omega 3 fats help lower blood triglycerides, protect against blood clotting, and may reduce the risk of cardiac arrest. The Lyon Heart Study used more canola oil than olive oil for this reason.</p> <p>Polyunsaturated fats other than Omega-3 fats are not as bad as saturated fats but do not have the HDL protecting properties of monounsaturated fats. Polyunsaturated fats are found in corn, safflower, and sunflower oils.</p>

While **alcohol**, specifically wine, is traditionally used in moderation in the Mediterranean diet, it should be considered optional. Because of the risk of breast cancer, the general guidelines for men and women are different:

- If you do not drink alcohol, you should not start.
- Men: limit to no more than two drinks a day
- Women: no more than 4 drinks per week
- Some individuals, such as those with high blood triglycerides, should consider avoiding alcohol completely.

## LOSING WEIGHT WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN LIFESTYLE

It is possible to maintain or lose weight on the Mediterranean diet.

This assumes you are substituting calories not adding them.

Research shows that long-term compliance with a Mediterranean type diet appears to be better than with very low fat diets.

- Calories from foods like oils and nuts should be substituted for other foods in the diet, not simply added to the diet. For example: peanut butter instead of bologna; olive oil instead of butter or stick margarine; ¼ cup of almonds instead of cheese and crackers.
- Even healthy foods provide calories. Reducing large portions of fish, chicken, pasta, nuts and potatoes while increasing lower calorie non-starchy vegetables like broccoli, spinach, salad greens, red peppers, asparagus, and green beans can significantly lower calories yet help keep you feeling full. For example: 1 ½ cups of broccoli has less calories than 1/3 cup of rice
- Remember, the Mediterranean lifestyle not only includes diet, but also regular physical activity. This not only makes it easier to reach your weight loss goals and maintain weight lost, but also helps to lower your blood pressure, raises your good HDL cholesterol, and lowers blood sugar in diabetics by improving insulin resistance.

## A DAY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

### A Sample Menu: Day 1

- Breakfast: 1 cup raisin bran cereal  
¼ cup chopped walnuts  
1 cup skim milk
- Lunch: Tuna Salad Sandwich  
3 ounces (1/2 the can) light tuna  
1 Tablespoon canola oil mayonnaise  
2 slices whole wheat bread (or other whole grain)  
¼ cup diced celery and/or onion (if desired)  
½ cup Baby Carrot Sticks  
Fresh orange
- Dinner: 1.5 cups cooked pasta, whole wheat  
Topped with vegetables sautéed in olive oil:  
½ cup eggplant, 1 medium diced tomato, ½ cup mushrooms, and 2 garlic cloves  
all sautéed in 1T olive oil  
*(or for a quick alternative, try adding chopped zucchini, squash, and onion to your favorite tomato sauce)*  
Sprinkle with 1 Tablespoon Parmesan cheese  
Green salad (1 cup)  
1 Tablespoon vinaigrette made with olive or canola oil  
Red Wine (4 ounces, OPTIONAL)
- Snack: 1 cup non-fat yogurt with ½ cup fresh berries of your choice  
(blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, etc.)

## A DAY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

### A Sample Menu: Day 2

- Breakfast: ½ cup cooked oatmeal  
Add 1 Tablespoon dried cranberries  
Add 1 Tablespoon ground flax seed  
(or use nuts or sunflower seeds)  
1 cup skim milk
- Snack: ½ whole wheat pita cut into wedges, toasted for extra crunch if desired  
¼ cup hummas
- Lunch: Spinach Salad  
1 cup baby spinach leaves  
¼ cup slivered almonds  
¼ cup mandarin oranges  
3 ounces skinless chicken breast  
2 tablespoons bottled vinaigrette made with olive or canola oil
- Dinner: 4 ounces baked/grilled Salmon (brushed with 1 tsp olive oil prior to cooking)  
1 cup steamed baby asparagus (or snap beans if you prefer)  
1 cup wild rice blend
- Snack: 1 cup fresh strawberries or cantaloupe  
½ cup low fat cottage cheese

## FOR MORE INFORMATION OR INDIVIDUALIZED COUNSELING

With today's abundance of books and internet resources, finding the right information can be challenging. Unfortunately many Mediterranean cookbooks contain recipes with long lists of expensive ingredients and complicated instructions. These recipes may in fact contain beneficial vegetables but be excessive in calories, fat and/or sodium. The following book is one recommended for its accurate information and reasonable recipes:

*The Mediterranean Heart Diet: Why it Works and How to Reap the Health Benefits, with Recipes to Get You Started.* By Helen V. Fisher with Cynthia Thomson, PH.D., R.D.

Many people find it very helpful to meet with a registered dietitian for individualized help with diet changes and goal setting. Initial appointments with scheduled follow-ups provide accountability that has been particularly beneficial for those struggling with weight loss or obtaining goal blood cholesterol/lipid levels.

Ask your doctor for a referral to one of UVA's Cardiovascular Registered Dietitians or call (434) 243-9396 for questions.

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## RECIPE IDEAS

### **Lentil Stew with Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Diced Tomato, and Barley**

4 cups lentils	1 cup barley
6 cups chicken stock, low sodium	2 small zucchini, sliced
2 small yellow squash, sliced	½ cup carrots, diced
½ cup onion, diced	2 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup fresh thyme	2 cups tomatoes, diced

- Cook lentils in 4 cups of chicken stock until tender. Cook barley in 2 cups of chicken stock.
- Sauté zucchini, squash, carrots, and onion in olive oil.
- Combine lentils, beans, and sautéed vegetables. Season with chopped thyme.

### **Wild Rice Salad with Oranges, Pecans, and Balsamic Vinegar**

4 cups wild rice, cooked  
2 cups Mandarin orange segments  
1 cup chopped pecans  
½ cup balsamic vinegar  
1 cup celery, diced  
½ cup red onion, diced

Combine all ingredients and mix well.