



Mediterranean Diet 101: A Meal Plan and Beginner's Guide

The Mediterranean diet is based on the traditional foods that people used to eat in countries like Italy and Greece back in 1960.

Researchers noted that these people were exceptionally healthy compared to Americans and had a low risk of many lifestyle diseases.

Numerous studies have now shown that the Mediterranean diet can cause weight loss and help prevent heart attacks, strokes, type 2 diabetes and premature death.

There is no one right way to follow the Mediterranean diet, as there are many countries around the Mediterranean Sea and people in different areas may have eaten different foods.

This article describes the dietary pattern typically prescribed in studies that suggest it's a healthy way of eating.

Consider all of this as a general guideline, not something written in stone. The plan can be adjusted to your individual needs and preferences.

The Basics

- **Eat:** Vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, potatoes, whole grains, breads, herbs, spices, fish, seafood and extra virgin olive oil.
- **Eat in moderation:** Poultry, eggs, cheese and yogurt.
- **Eat only rarely:** Red meat.
- **Don't eat:** Sugar-sweetened beverages, added sugars, processed meat, refined grains, refined oils and other highly processed foods.

Avoid These Unhealthy Foods

You should avoid these unhealthy foods and ingredients:

- **Added sugar:** Soda, candies, ice cream, table sugar and many others.
- **Refined grains:** White bread, pasta made with refined wheat, etc.
- **Trans fats:** Found in margarine and various processed foods.
- **Refined oils:** Soybean oil, canola oil, cottonseed oil and others.
- **Processed meat:** Processed sausages, hot dogs, etc.
- **Highly processed foods:** Anything labeled "low-fat" or "diet" or which looks like it was made in a factory.

You must read food labels carefully if you want to avoid these unhealthy ingredients.

A Mediterranean Sample Menu for 1 Week

Below is a sample menu for one week 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 oats.
- **Lunch:** Whole-grain sandwich with vegetables.
- **Dinner:** A tuna salad, dressed in olive oil. A piece of fruit for dessert.

Tuesday

- **Breakfast:** Oatmeal with raisins.
- **Lunch:** Leftover tuna salad from the night before.
- **Dinner:** Salad with tomatoes, olives and feta cheese.

Wednesday

- **Breakfast:** Omelet with veggies, tomatoes, and onions. A piece of fruit.
- **Lunch:** Whole-grain sandwich, with cheese and fresh vegetables.
- **Dinner:** Mediterranean lasagna.

Thursday

- **Breakfast:** Yogurt with sliced fruits and nuts.
- **Lunch:** Leftover lasagna from the night before.
- **Dinner:** Broiled salmon, served with brown rice and vegetables.

Friday

- **Breakfast:** Eggs and vegetables, fried in olive oil.
- **Lunch:** Greek yogurt with strawberries, oats and nuts.
- **Dinner:** Grilled lamb, with salad and baked potato.

Saturday

- **Breakfast:** Oatmeal with raisins, nuts and an apple.
- **Lunch:** Whole-grain sandwich with vegetables.
- **Dinner:** Mediterranean pizza made with whole wheat, topped with cheese, vegetables and olives.

Sunday

- **Breakfast:** Omelet with veggies and olives.
- **Lunch:** Leftover pizza from the night before.
- **Dinner:** Grilled chicken, with vegetables and a potato. Fruit for dessert.

There is usually no need to count calories or track macronutrients (protein, fat and carbs) on the Mediterranean diet.

Healthy Mediterranean Snacks

You don't need to eat more than 3 meals per day.

But if you become hungry between meals, there are plenty of healthy snack options:

- A handful of nuts.
- A piece of fruit.
- Carrots or baby carrots.
- Some berries or grapes.
- Leftovers from the night before.
- Greek yogurt.
- Apple slices with almond butter.

How to Follow the Diet at Restaurants

It's very simple to make most restaurant meals suitable for the Mediterranean diet.

1. Choose fish or seafood as your main dish.
2. Ask them to fry your food in extra virgin olive oil.
3. Only eat whole-grain bread, with olive oil instead of butter.

If you want more general advice on how to eat healthy at restaurants, check out this article.

A Simple Shopping List for The Diet

It is always a good idea to shop at the perimeter of the store. That's usually where the whole foods are. Always try to choose the least-processed option. Organic is best, but only if you can easily afford it.

- **Vegetables:** Carrots, onions, broccoli, spinach, kale, garlic, etc.
- **Fruits:** Apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, etc.
- **Berries:** Strawberries, blueberries, etc.
- **Frozen veggies:** Choose mixes with healthy vegetables.
- **Grains:** Whole-grain bread, whole-grain pasta, etc.
- **Legumes:** Lentils, pulses, beans, etc.
- **Nuts:** Almonds, walnuts, cashews, etc.
- **Seeds:** Sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.
- **Condiments:** Sea salt, pepper, turmeric, cinnamon, etc.
- **Fish:** Salmon, sardines, mackerel, trout.
- **Shrimp and shellfish.**
- **Potatoes and sweet potatoes.**
- **Cheese.**
- **Greek yogurt.**
- **Chicken.**
- **Pastured or omega-3 enriched eggs.**
- **Olives.**
- **Extra virgin olive oil.**

It's best to clear all unhealthy temptations from your home, including sodas, ice cream, candy, pastries, white bread, crackers and processed foods.

If you only have healthy food in your home, you will eat healthy food.

The Bottom Line

Though there is not one defined Mediterranean diet, this way of eating is generally rich in healthy plant foods and relatively lower in animal foods, with a focus on fish and seafood.

You can find a whole world of information about the Mediterranean diet on the internet, and many great books have been written about it.

Try googling "Mediterranean recipes" and you will find a ton of great tips for delicious meals.

At the end of the day, the Mediterranean diet is incredibly healthy and satisfying. You won't be disappointed.