Mediterranean diet

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Health benefits

Summary

Many doctors and dietitians recommend a Mediterranean diet to prevent disease and keep people healthy for longer.

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and it includes less dairy and meat than a typical Western diet.

In this article, we explain what the Mediterranean diet is and provide a 7-day meal plan for people to follow.

What is a Mediterranean diet?

Essentially, following a Mediterranean diet means eating in the way that the people in the Mediterranean region traditionally ate.

A traditional diet from the Mediterranean region includes a generous portion of fresh produce, whole grains, and legumes, as well as some healthful fats and fish.

The general guidelines of the diet recommend that people eat:

a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains

healthful fats, such as nuts, seeds, and olive oil

moderate amounts of dairy and fish

very little white meat and red meat

few eggs

red wine in moderation

The American Heart AssociationTrusted Source note that the average Mediterranean diet contains a high percentage of calories from fat.

Although more than half of the calories from fat come from monounsaturated fats, such as olive oil, the diet may not be right for people who need to limit their fat intake.

Building a meal plan

The Mediterranean diet puts a higher focus on plant foods than many other diets. It is not uncommon for vegetables, whole grains, and legumes to make up all or most of a meal.

People following the diet typically cook these foods using healthful fats, such as olive oil, and add plenty of flavorful spices.

Meals may include small portions of fish, meat, or eggs.

Water and sparkling water are common drink choices, as well as moderate amounts of red wine.

People on a Mediterranean diet avoid the following foods:

refined grains, such as white bread, white pasta, and pizza dough containing white flour

trans fats which can be found in margarine and other processed foods

foods with added sugars, such as pastries, sodas, and candies

deli meats, hot dogs, and other processed meats

processed or packaged foods

7-day meal plan

Here is an example of a 7-day Mediterranean diet meal plan:

Day 1

Breakfast

one pan-fried egg

whole-wheat toast

grilled tomatoes

For additional calories, add another egg or some sliced avocado to the toast.

Lunch

2 cups of mixed salad greens with cherry tomatoes and olives on top and a dressing of olive oil and vinegar

whole-grain pita bread

2 ounces (oz) of hummus

Dinner

whole-grain pizza with tomato sauce, grilled vegetables, and low-fat cheese as toppings

For added calories, add some shredded chicken, ham, tuna, or pine nuts to the pizza.

Day 2

Breakfast

1 cup of Greek yogurt

half a cup of fruits, such as blueberries, raspberries, or chopped nectarines

For additional calories, add 1–2 oz of almonds or walnuts.

Lunch

whole-grain sandwich with grilled vegetables, such as eggplant, zucchini, bell pepper, and onion

To increase the calorie content, spread hummus or avocado on the bread before adding the fillings.

Dinner

one portion of baked cod or salmon with garlic and black pepper to add flavor

one roasted potato with olive oil and chives

Day 3

Breakfast

1 cup of whole-grain oats with cinnamon, dates, and honey

top with low-sugar fruits, such as raspberries

1 oz of shredded almonds (optional)

Lunch

boiled white beans with spices, such as laurel, garlic, and cumin

1 cup of arugula with an olive oil dressing and toppings of tomato, cucumber, and feta cheese

Dinner

one-half of a cup of whole-grain pasta with tomato sauce, olive oil, and grilled vegetables

1 tablespoon of Parmesan cheese

Day 4

Breakfast

two-egg scramble with bell peppers, onions, and tomatoes

top with 1 oz of queso fresco or one-quarter of an avocado

Lunch

roasted anchovies in olive oil on whole-grain toast with a sprinkling of lemon juice

a warm salad comprising 2 cups of steamed kale and tomatoes

Dinner

2 cups of steamed spinach with a sprinkling of lemon juice and herbs

one boiled artichoke with olive oil, garlic powder, and salt

Add another artichoke for a hearty, filling meal.

Day 5

Breakfast

1 cup of Greek yogurt with cinnamon and honey on top

mix in a chopped apple and shredded almonds

Lunch

1 cup of quinoa with bell peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, and olives

roasted garbanzo beans with oregano and thyme

top with feta cheese crumbles or avocado (optional)

Dinner

2 cups of steamed kale with tomato, cucumber, olives, lemon juice, and Parmesan cheese

a portion of grilled sardines with a slice of lemon

Day 6

Breakfast

two slices of whole-grain toast with soft cheese, such as ricotta, queso fresco, or goat cheese

add chopped blueberries or figs for sweetness

Lunch

2 cups of mixed greens with tomato and cucumber

a small portion of roasted chicken with a sprinkling of olive oil and lemon juice

Dinner

oven-roasted vegetables, such as:

artichoke

carrot

zucchini

eggplant

sweet potato

tomato

toss in olive oil and heavy herbs before roasting

1 cup of whole-grain couscous

Day 7

Breakfast

whole-grain oats with cinnamon, dates, and maple syrup

top with low-sugar fruits, such as raspberries or blackberries

Lunch

stewed zucchini, yellow squash, onion, and potato in a tomato and herb sauce

Dinner

2 cups of greens, such as arugula or spinach, with tomato, olives, and olive oil

a small portion of white fish

leftover vegetable stew from lunch

Snacks

There are many snack options available as part of the Mediterranean diet.

Suitable snacks include:

a small serving of nuts

whole fruits, such as oranges, plums, and grapes

dried fruits, including apricots and figs

a small serving of yogurt

hummus with celery, carrots, or other vegetables

avocado on whole-grain toast