

## ***The Mediterranean Diet is Both Ancient and Modern***

It is ancient because it is a traditional, simple cuisine that evolved over 5, 000 years in a rugged, windy, hilly terrain whose harsh environment gives intense flavor to plants and wild herbs. This led inhabitants to adopt a unique plant-based diet using home-grown and prepared ingredients and featuring regional dishes. It is modern because over fifty years of research has shown that the Mediterranean Diet is both palatable and it gives great health benefits leading to some of the longest life expectancies in the world as well as the lowest rates of chronic disease including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia, etc. It has been declared one of the top three “Best Overall Diets for 2015” by *US News and World Report*.

The first examination of its health benefits occurred the late 1940s when the government of Greece asked the Rockefeller Foundation to study the health and eating habits of the people on the island of Crete out of concern that they were poor and lacked sufficient nutrition. They found that Cretans ate over 60% of their calories from plant food, only 7% from animal foods and a large intake of olive oil as compared to 37% plant food in the US, 30% from animal food and about half the oil. The incredible results were that the people on Crete enjoyed significantly lower heart disease and longer life expectancy with few nutritional problems. The amazing thing is that the Government was concerned that the poor people on Crete had an inadequate diet as compared to their western counterparts.

This was followed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by extensive research called the “Seven Countries Study” which examined the eating habits and health outcomes of over 13,000 middle-aged men in US, Japan, Italy, Greece, Netherland, Finland, and Yugoslavia. The goal was to document the relationship between lifestyle, nutrition, and cardiovascular disease among different populations. This was the first study of its kind. The results showed that people living in Crete, southern Greece and southern Italy had especially good health and tended to live longer, had fewer rates of heart disease, and lower rate of dementia while eating a plant-based diet, with small amounts of animal food and generous amount of olive oil.

This was followed up with a multitude of studies on different aspects of diet and heart disease. The Lyon Diet Heart Study, published in 2005, showed a 50-70% reduction in the rate of a second heart attack in people who followed the principles of the Mediterranean Diet. In fact the study was stopped early since the results were so definitive.

So what do you eat to follow a Mediterranean Diet? It is based on the dietary patterns of Crete in late 1950s and early 1960s. It is a diet of abundance not one of restriction and is easy to fit into your lifestyle. Eat plant-based, minimally processed, fresh, whole food with lots of variety and your health will benefit!

### **1. FATS:**

- Eat a high consumption of Monounsaturated fats
- The focus is not on limiting fats BUT on switching to healthier fats
- Skip all Hydrogenated fats, *Trans* fats and limit Saturated fats (which include lard, butter, meat, dairy, coconut and palm oil)
- Olive Oil - use abundantly in cooking and dressings
  - Olive oil is mainly monounsaturated. Monounsaturated fat helps to reduce LDL or “bad” cholesterol
  - Extra-Virgin and Virgin Olive Oil is the least processed forms and have the highest levels of protective plant compounds which act as antioxidants
- Polyunsaturated Oils with *Omega-3* fatty acids include Canola (rapeseed), soybean, peanut oils
- Include other Polyunsaturated Oils such as safflower, sunflower, and corn oil

### **Bernards Township Health Department**

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## 2. Vegetables:

- Eat at least 2-3 servings/day
- Include a variety:
  - Root vegetables such as carrots, leeks, parsnips, turnips, potatoes, onions, radishes, rutabaga, and turnips;
  - Dark green leafy vegetables such as arugula, spinach, kale and swiss chard; tomatoes
  - Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, cabbage, horseradish, etc.
- These include phytochemicals (plant chemicals which act as antioxidants) as well as nutrients including potassium, dietary fiber, folate (folic acid), vitamin A, and vitamin C.

## 3. Fruit :

- Eat at least 2-3 servings/day
- Choose a variety of fruits with many different colors. These color pigments are all different kinds of phytochemicals
- These include phytochemicals (plant chemicals which act as antioxidants), dietary fiber, vitamin C, folate (folic acid), potassium and more.

## 4. Beans and Legumes:

- Include at least 3 servings per week such as lentils, beans, peas, alfalfa, peanuts
- These are high in dietary fiber, plant protein, folate (folic acid), potassium, iron and zinc.

## 5. Fish and Seafood:

- Eat at least 3 servings per week
- Include fatty fish with omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, salmon
- Includes protein and nutrients such as B vitamins (niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, and B6), vitamin E, iron, zinc, and magnesium.
- Grill, bake, or broil

## 6. Nuts and Seeds:

- Eat at least one serving per week but since they tend to be high in fat limit nuts to one handful
- Choose those that are not salted or sweetened
- Eat almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, pistachios, walnuts; natural peanut butter or tahini (ground, hulled sesame seeds)

## 7. Whole Grains:

- “Whole” should appear in the ingredient list and means that the grain includes germ, bran and endosperm of the grain kernel.
- Rich in dietary fiber, several B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folate), and minerals (iron, magnesium, and selenium).
- Contain phytochemicals
- “Refined” means germ and bran are removed and they lose vitamins, minerals and fiber such as “white or all purpose” flour i.e. bread, pasta, polenta, couscous, risotto



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## 8. Meat:

- Choose poultry instead of red meat or processed meat
- Limit red meat to one or two times per month and portion size of meat to size of pack of cards

## 9. Dairy Products:

- Low to Moderate amounts
- Mostly in form of cheese and yogurt
- Look for foods that have beneficial probiotics

## 10. Alcohol:

- Regular and Moderate consumption of alcohol in form of red wine during meals:
- All Women and Men over age 65 years = moderate < one 5oz glass per day
- Men under age 65 years = moderate = < two 5 oz glasses red wine per day
- Drinking over this can cause some cancers
- If you don't drink – don't start.

## 11. Use herbs and spices in abundance.

**12. Energy (Calorie) Input should = Energy (Calorie) Output** to maintain a healthy body weight.

## Olive Oil:

- Varieties: ranked from highest to lowest quality: extra-virgin, superfine, fine, virgin and pure.
- Extra-virgin olive oil is the first pressing of whole unblemished olives done within a day of harvest.
- In a conventional retail store, certain characteristics of labeling and bottling suggest (though they don't guarantee) high quality:
  - a harvest date (as opposed to a meaningless “best by” date),
  - a specific place of production and producer,
  - mention of the cultivar of olives used,
  - dark glass bottles (light degrades olive oil),
  - a D.O.P. seal on European oils, and a California Olive Oil Council seal on oil made in the U.S.

*Learn more about Olive Oil at:*

[www.truthinoliveoil.com](http://www.truthinoliveoil.com)

[www.californiaoliveranch.com](http://www.californiaoliveranch.com)



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# Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

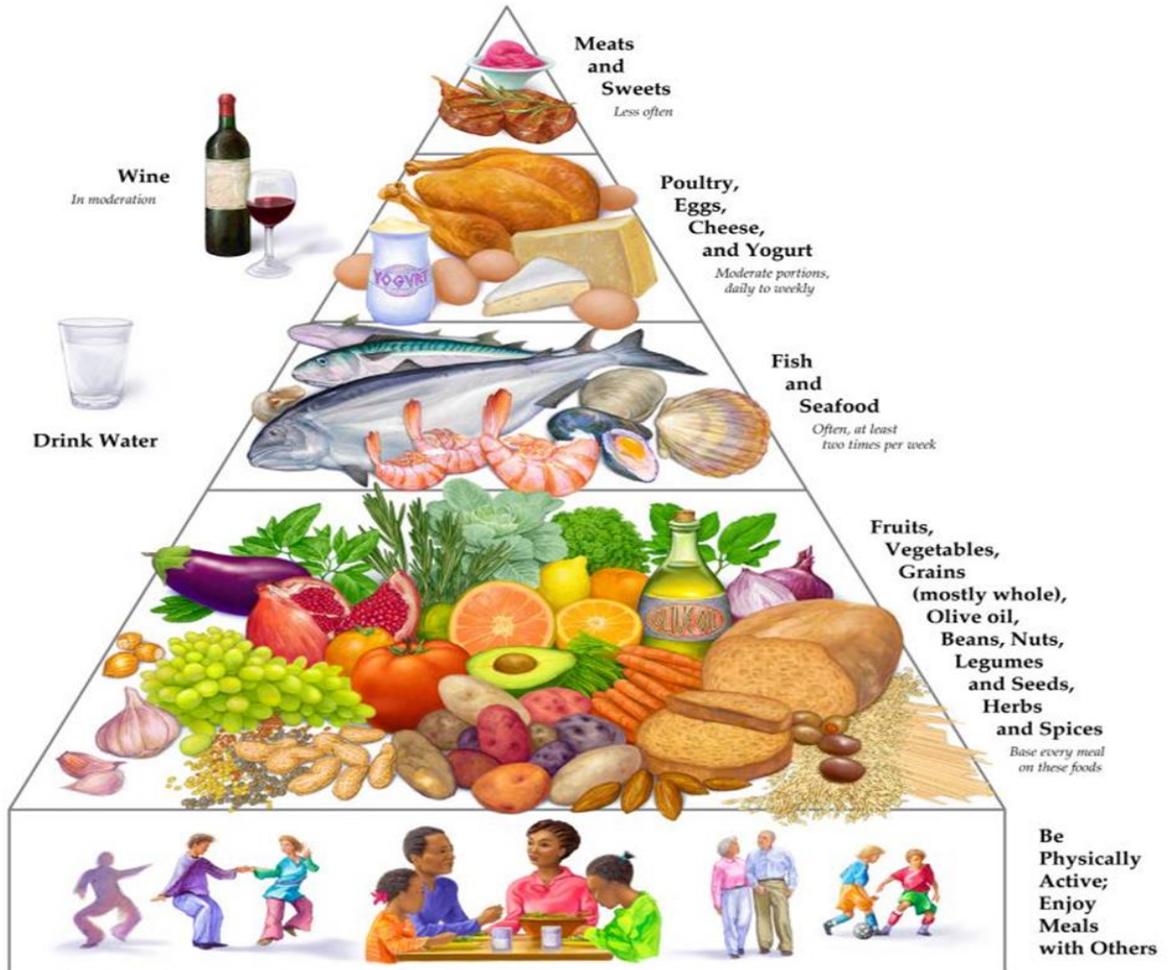


Illustration by George Middleton

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