

Mediterranean-style diet

This factsheet describes how to follow a Mediterranean-style diet for good health.

What is a Mediterranean-style diet?

A Mediterranean-style diet comes from the traditional eating pattern of people from countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. These include Greece, Italy and Spain.

This diet is based on healthy whole foods and includes very few processed foods.

A Mediterranean-style diet is based on these foods:

- vegetables
- fruits
- extra virgin olive oil
- wholegrain breads and cereals
- legumes or beans (e.g. chickpeas, kidney beans or lentils)
- nuts and seeds
- fish and seafood
- onion, garlic and other herbs and spices (e.g. oregano, coriander, cumin etc.)

Can I include meat and dairy foods?

Yoghurt, cheese, milk and lean protein sources such as chicken, turkey or eggs are also eaten in a Mediterranean-style diet. Red meats and sweets are only eaten in small amounts. Processed meats (deli meats, bacon, ham, corned meats, salami or sausages) and packaged foods should be limited to rare occasions.

Can I drink alcohol?

Wine (especially red wine) is a traditional part of a Mediterranean-style diet. For people who choose to drink alcohol, wine is only consumed in small amounts and with meals.

Other eating tips in a Mediterranean-style diet

Following a Mediterranean-style diet is not just about what foods you eat but also about *how* you eat them:

- Try preparing fresh foods
- Ideally share your meals with friends or family
- Eat meals and snacks without distractions (e.g. not in front of the TV or at your desk)
- Eat slowly so that the taste and flavour can be appreciated

Why is a Mediterranean-style diet healthy?

The Mediterranean-style diet is healthy because:

- it has a good balance of healthy fats
- it is high in fresh foods and has lower levels of highly processed foods
- It is high in fibre. This makes the diet filling without providing excess calories
- It is high in antioxidants and can reduce inflammation in the body

These benefits are related to following a Mediterranean-style eating pattern as a whole, not from single foods or nutrients.

Following a Mediterranean-style diet can help people with:

- heart disease
- type 2 diabetes
- fatty liver disease
- chronic kidney disease
- depression or anxiety

This style of eating can also help to prevent people from developing the conditions listed above, as well as:

- some cancers, including bowel cancer
- cognitive decline, including dementia

What does Mediterranean-style eating look like?

This food pyramid shows the foods and drinks in a Mediterranean-style diet. At the base of the pyramid are foods to eat the most. At the top are foods to eat in small amounts or less often. Enjoying meals with others and being active is also highlighted. If you have liver disease it is best to discuss any alcohol intake with your doctor.

Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

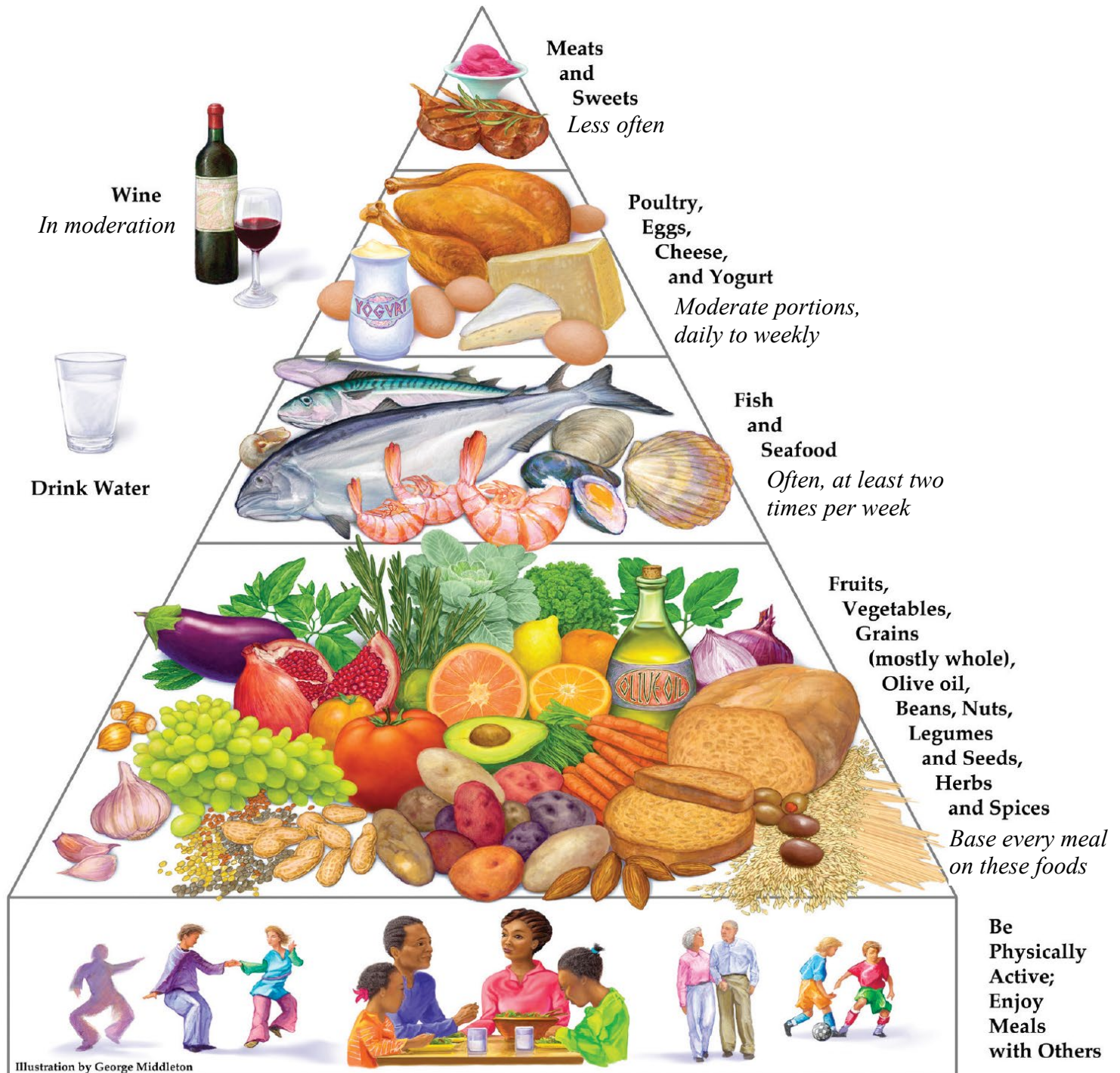


Illustration by George Middleton

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Developed: November 2021
Due for review: November 2023



What and how much should I be eating to follow a Mediterranean-style diet?

Food group	Serving size (1 cup = 250 mL measuring cup)	Servings per day or per week
Foods to include every day		
Vegetables	1 cup salad or ½ cup cooked / 75 g	5 serves per day (or more) <i>Include leafy greens and tomatoes daily</i>
Wholegrain breads / cereals / rice / pasta	30 g cereal / 1 small wrap / 1 slice bread / ½ pita / ½ cup cooked rice or pasta	4-6 servings per day
Extra virgin olive oil	1 tablespoon / 20 mL	2-4 tablespoons per day <i>Choose Australian certified</i>
Fruit	1 whole piece / 1 cup diced / 1½ tablespoons dried	2-3 serves per day (2 serves fresh)
Water	6-8 250 mL glasses per day	Should be the main drink
Foods to include a few times per week		
Nuts (unsalted)	1 handful / 30 g	3 serves per week (or more)
Legumes (canned or dry)	1 cup / 150 g	3 serves per week (or more)
Fish and seafood	100-150 g	2 serves per week (or more), at least 1 oily (e.g. salmon, tuna or sardines)
Eggs	1 egg / 50-60 g	4 serves per week (or less)
Cheese (feta, ricotta or cottage)	2 thick slices / 40 g	2-4 serves per week
Yoghurt (unsweetened)	1 small tub (120-200 g) / ½ cup	4-6 serves per week
Milk (unflavoured)	1 cup	½ -1 serve per day
Chicken or turkey	100-150 g	1-3 serves per week
Foods to include less often		
Sweet /savoury snacks	30 g chocolate / small packet chips / 2 biscuits	3 serves per week (or less)
Red Meat (beef, lamb or pork)	80-100 g / size of deck of cards	1 serve per week (or less)
Red wine (if you choose to drink)	100 mL / 1 standard drink	1-2 glasses per day <i>with meals and no more than 10 per week</i>

This table is a guide. A Dietitian can help you determine how many serves is right for you.

Mediterranean-style meal and snack Ideas

BREAKFAST options

- Porridge: rolled oats made with milk/water, with fruit, honey and/or nuts
- Natural Greek style yoghurt with fruit, nuts or untoasted muesli, and honey
- Wholegrain breakfast cereal (e.g. Weetbix, Vitabrits, All Bran, Sultana Bran) with milk/yoghurt
- Toast (wholemeal or multigrain) with extra virgin olive oil and ricotta/cottage/feta cheese OR poached/boiled/scrambled egg OR grilled tomato and herbs OR baked beans

LUNCH options

- Salad, including tomato and a dark leafy green such as spinach and canned beans or legumes, with extra virgin olive oil
- Sandwiches/wraps – wholemeal bread, roll, wrap or pita with salad. Use canned fish, beans, hummus or chicken breast as a filling. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil
- Wholemeal pasta with vegetables and extra virgin olive oil or tomato based sauce. Try replacing meat with canned lentils or beans

DINNER options

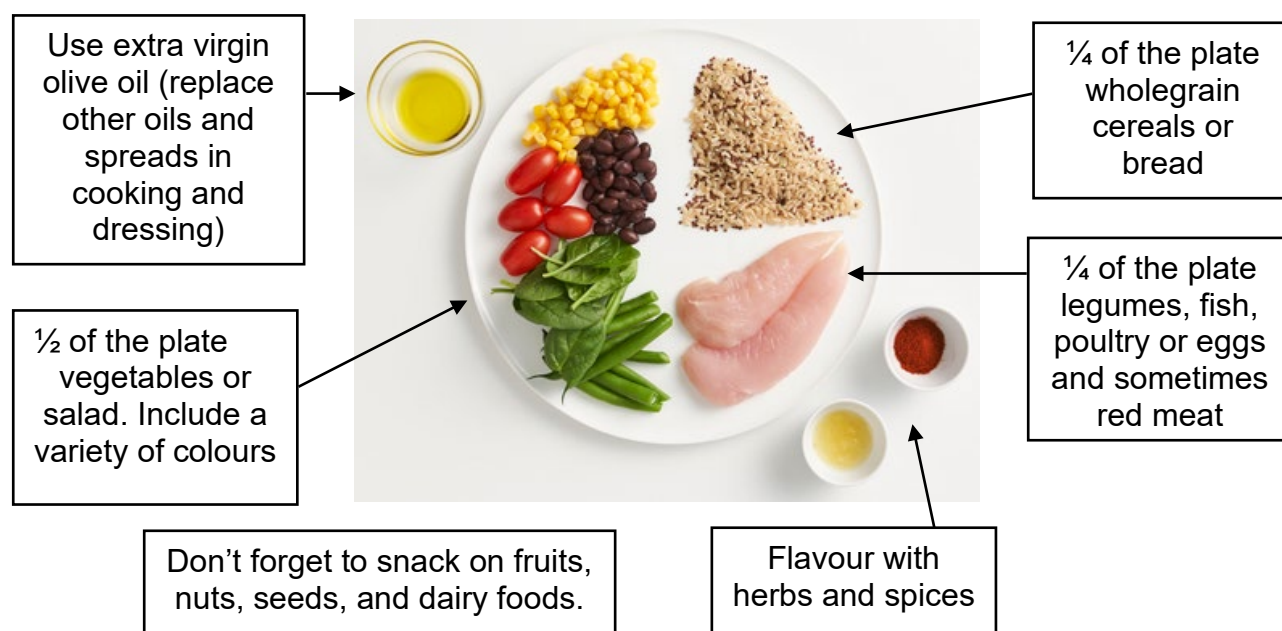
- Vegetable soup, including chickpeas/lentils with vegetables, canned tomatoes and onion.
- Chicken breast: stir-fry, baked or grilled in extra virgin olive oil and mixed herbs with salad or vegetables and wholemeal bread or rice
- Homemade pizzas, with a wholemeal bread base and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil. Try vegetable toppings such as onion, eggplant and zucchini
- Small portion of lean beef, lamb, veal or kangaroo: stir-fry, baked or grilled in extra virgin olive oil with salad or vegetables and canned beans/lentils.
- Optional extra: 1 small glass of red wine *with your meal*

SNACKS

- Handful of nuts and/or seeds
- Fruit (fresh, canned or dried)
- Fresh vegetable sticks with hummus or tzatziki
- Natural Greek style yoghurt
- Wholemeal crusty bread dipped in extra virgin olive oil/pesto
- Avocado on toast or wholegrain crackers (with extra virgin olive oil)
- Boiled egg OR feta/ricotta cheese on a slice of wholemeal bread or crackers

Acknowledgement: the included food, meal and snack recommendations were adapted based on materials developed for the LIFE, MedLey, AUSMED and MEDINA Mediterranean diet research studies in Australia

Putting it all together – Mediterranean-style portions on plate



Imaged sourced from National Heart Foundation of Australia

Mediterranean-style diet resources including information, research and recipes

Websites:

Oldways <https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet>

International Foundation of Mediterranean diet <https://dietamediterranea.com/en/nutrition/>

Mediterranean Living <https://www.mediterraneanliving.com/>

Heart Foundation <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/heart-health-education/healthy-eating>

Grains & legumes nutrition council <https://www.glnc.org.au/>

Nuts for life <https://www.nutsforlife.com.au>

Books:

The Mediterranean Diet <https://www.panmacmillan.com.au/9781742610825/>

The Heart Health Guide <https://www.panmacmillan.com.au/9781760785765/the-heart-health-guide/>

Mediterranean diet cookbook and lifestyle plans <https://treeoflifefood.com.au/cookbook/>

Things I can do to improve my style of diet to be more Mediterranean:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____