

Visit the Mediterranean

The healthiest diet in the world was not developed in a laboratory. Rather, it is a collection of traditional eating and lifestyle habits adhered to by the people living in the Mediterranean region, which includes parts of Crete, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria.

Inhabitants in that area enjoy life-long good health and 25% lower overall death rates if they closely follow their native diet. Mediterranean eaters live an average of one year longer than their less traditional counterparts. Specifically, they have lower rates of heart disease and hypertension, as well as fewer deaths due to coronary artery disease. Cancer risks and cancer deaths are also significantly lower among those who follow a traditional diet.

Studies among those who live outside the region show promise, too. Westerners who switch to a Mediterranean Diet following their first heart attack reduce their risk of having a second heart attack by 50–70%. People who suffer from Metabolic Syndrome seem to successfully rid themselves of the condition when they switch from a low-fat diet to a Mediterranean-style diet. Overall, following a traditional Mediterranean Diet, no matter where in the world you live, can reduce your risk of developing most chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, asthma and even obesity.

For all of the health reasons cited above, many researchers and health professionals recommend that people adopt the Mediterranean Diet and lifestyle. There are many different diets that are healthy,



but this is one that has the most evidence that it can lower the risk of chronic disease for entire populations. One key factor in all of this is that there is not one component in particular that offers more of a benefit than another. Therefore, you can't pick and choose parts of the diet to incorporate. You must follow all of the aspects of the diet.

As you can see from the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid on page 3 (courtesy of Oldways), the diet is generally rich in vegetables, beans, nuts, fruits, grains, olive oil and fish. It is high in fiber and fat, low in saturated fat and meat and moderate in dairy and alcohol. The Mediterranean Diet is a plant-based diet that limits processed foods, saturated fat, salt, refined sugars and trans fats, and is rich in antioxidants and other phytonutrients that help fight chronic diseases. The following are details about how to follow the Mediterranean Diet and lifestyle.

The Daily Diet

✓ Olive Oil

I hope I didn't scare you away when I said that the Mediterranean Diet is high in fat. People who follow the diet tend to weigh less than those who follow a more "Western" diet that is lower in fat but higher in saturated and trans fats, which shows that you can eat a lot of fat and still be thin and healthy, as long as you're eating the right kind of fat. Extra virgin olive oil is the main source of fat in the diet and it is used liberally for cooking, as a dip for bread and as a salad dressing. In fact, the recommendation to use olive oil for health reasons originally stemmed from research on Mediterranean populations. Detailed research since then has revealed links between the use of olive oil and decreased risks of breast, ovarian, and stomach cancers, reduced risk of heart disease and lower rates of inflammation. It is the principal source of fat, replacing butter, margarine, lard, partially hydrogenated oils, fatty meats and deep-fried foods. Most other fat in the diet comes from daily consumption of nuts and cheese and weekly consumption of fatty fish. Total fat in the diet can provide anywhere from 25–40% of total calories, which means you can adjust it to suit your personal preferences for fat. The important thing to remember is that the monounsaturated fat from olive oil should replace most of the saturated and trans fats in your diet, which means you'll have to minimize processed foods and meat-centered meals. This eating plan recommends that you eat extra virgin first cold pressed olive oil daily and liberally.

✓ Produce

The Mediterranean Diet is not a vegetarian diet, but it does emphasize eating most of your food from plant



Gelson's Registered Dietitian, **Jessica Siegel**, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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sources. Fresh, minimally processed produce is emphasized. Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and high in vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients and fiber, which all work together to control weight, blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol and inflammation. No fruits or vegetables are restricted, but an emphasis is placed on seasonal, locally grown produce. The benefit of this open-ended approach is that you can get creative with your cooking and add various ethnic flairs to your dishes, ranging from Mexican to Japanese, to keep the diet interesting and exciting. Vegetables are often eaten in salads and are incorporated into cooked mixed dishes. Leafy greens, particularly purslane, spinach, and fresh herbs (think basil, chilies, sage, cumin, thyme, parsley, oregano, rosemary, mint and dill); root vegetables, including garlic and onions; and tomatoes are especially prominent healthful items in the diet. Fruit is also a large part of the native diet and is often eaten at the end of the meal for dessert. Figs, grapes, olives and lemons seem to have an especially important role (walnut-stuffed figs is a favorite Mediterranean snack), but all fresh fruits are considered a healthy part of the diet. Fresh fruits

and vegetables, both raw and cooked, are to be eaten daily in abundance to maximize antioxidant intake.

✓ Grains & Cereals

Since Mediterranean cuisine varies by country and region, it is only to be expected that the native grains and cereals reflect that diversity. Therefore, pasta, cous cous, polenta, unrefined rice, bulgur, barley, buckwheat, farro, oats and various types of flat and crusty breads are included in the diet. Starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn are considered part of this group rather than the vegetable group, so keep in mind that you don't need bread or any other grain if you're serving potatoes or corn with a meal. All of these varieties of grains are readily available here in Southern California, but it's important to make a little extra effort to make sure that the grains you choose are minimally processed (for example, eat oats instead of cereal made with oat flour). Whole grains are to be eaten daily, but limited to one to two half-cup servings per meal.

✓ Beans, Other Legumes, Nuts & Seeds

Beans and other legumes, especially lentils, are heavily relied upon plant proteins in the Mediterranean Diet. Beans are extremely rich in antioxidants (red and kidney beans have more than blueberries!) and they are high in both fiber and protein, for ultimate blood sugar control. Recently, scientists found beans and legumes to be the single common factor in all healthful traditional cuisines, and Americans eat virtually none. Raw nuts and seeds, such as almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, pine nuts, sesame seeds and walnuts, contribute healthful fats,

protein and fiber to the diet and lend texture and flavor to dishes. Add beans and nuts to salads, soups, stews, sautéed vegetable dishes, and snack on edamame, hummus, walnuts, almonds and cashews. It will probably take some effort to make beans a regular part of your daily diet, but it is crucial to replace servings of red meat and poultry with these plant proteins.

✓ Yogurt & Cheese

Rejoice! Cheese is eaten daily on the Mediterranean Diet, usually in the form of Feta, Mozzarella and Reggiano Parmesan, which are lower in total fat and saturated fat than most other cheeses. Dairy is eaten each day but in small amounts as cultured and fermented products, like yogurt and cheese, but rarely as fresh milk. Cheese does contain saturated fat, but the quantity that cheese is eaten in is small enough to keep saturated fat to 7–8% of total calories. The high antioxidant content of the overall diet may help to offset the deleterious effects of the saturated fat in cheese as well.

✓ Wine

Wine, especially red wine, contributes significant amounts of antioxidants to the diet and has been shown to protect the heart. Wine is typically consumed daily with a meal, but in moderation; five ounces for women and ten ounces for men.

✓ Water

Water is essential to life—about 50–75% of your body weight is water. It is the primary beverage choice on the Mediterranean Diet and it contributes to overall health, well-being and energy levels since water carries nutrients throughout the body. Water needs can vary based on body size, climate and activity level, but most people need at least 64 ounces a day.



The Weekly Diet

✓ Fish & Shellfish

Fish is considered the healthiest of animal proteins and is therefore eaten at least twice a week. Wild fatty fish are rich in cardio-protective omega 3 fats and selenium, an antioxidant. Salmon, black cod, tuna, herring and mackerel are highest in omega 3 fats, but no fish or seafood is restricted. In fact, octopus is the Greek National Appetizer! Try to eat at least seven ounces of a variety of different fish and seafood each week.

✓ Poultry

Free-range or organic poultry is a small part of the Mediterranean Diet. Fish is favored over poultry since it contributes important but scarce healthful nutrients, while poultry's nutrients, such as protein, iron, zinc and B vitamins, are easily obtained from other foods. Chicken, turkey, and other poultry are eaten weekly, and in slightly smaller amounts than fish.

✓ Eggs

Free-range or organic eggs are eaten weekly on their own as omelets, for example or in pasta, breads, and cakes. Enjoy a Mediterranean-style omelet or frittata once or twice a week by first sautéing vegetables like onion, garlic, tomatoes and spinach in olive oil and then adding in the eggs. Enjoy up to seven eggs per week, including those used in cooking and baking.

✓ Sweets

Mediterranean dieters love their sweets and, although fruit is usually eaten for dessert, they do indulge in sugary treats weekly. The sweets, however, are usually sweetened with honey instead of high-fructose corn syrup or sugar. Though sweets are eaten in moderation, adherents to the diet do not seem to vilify sugar as a more Western diet tends to do. Small treats, such as dark chocolate, gelato and sorbet, are eaten just a few times a week.

The Monthly Diet

✓ Red Meat

This is another point where the Mediterranean Diet may be particularly challenging: red meat is only eaten a few times a month and in small portions. The average American eats a third of a pound of red meat per day! Choose leaner cuts of meat such as filet mignon, New York strip, top round and flank. Try to limit your red meat consumption,

including lamb, pork, veal, venison and buffalo to 12–16 ounces a month.

Other Lifestyle Factors

✓ Physical Activity

Daily physical activity plays an important role in the healthfulness of the Mediterranean lifestyle. Exercise helps to balance out calorie intake to promote a healthy weight. It also contributes to fitness, cardiovascular health and overall well-being. Try to incorporate activity into your daily routine by taking the stairs and parking the car a little further from your destination, as well as set aside time for strenuous and leisurely exercise, such as running, walking or yoga.

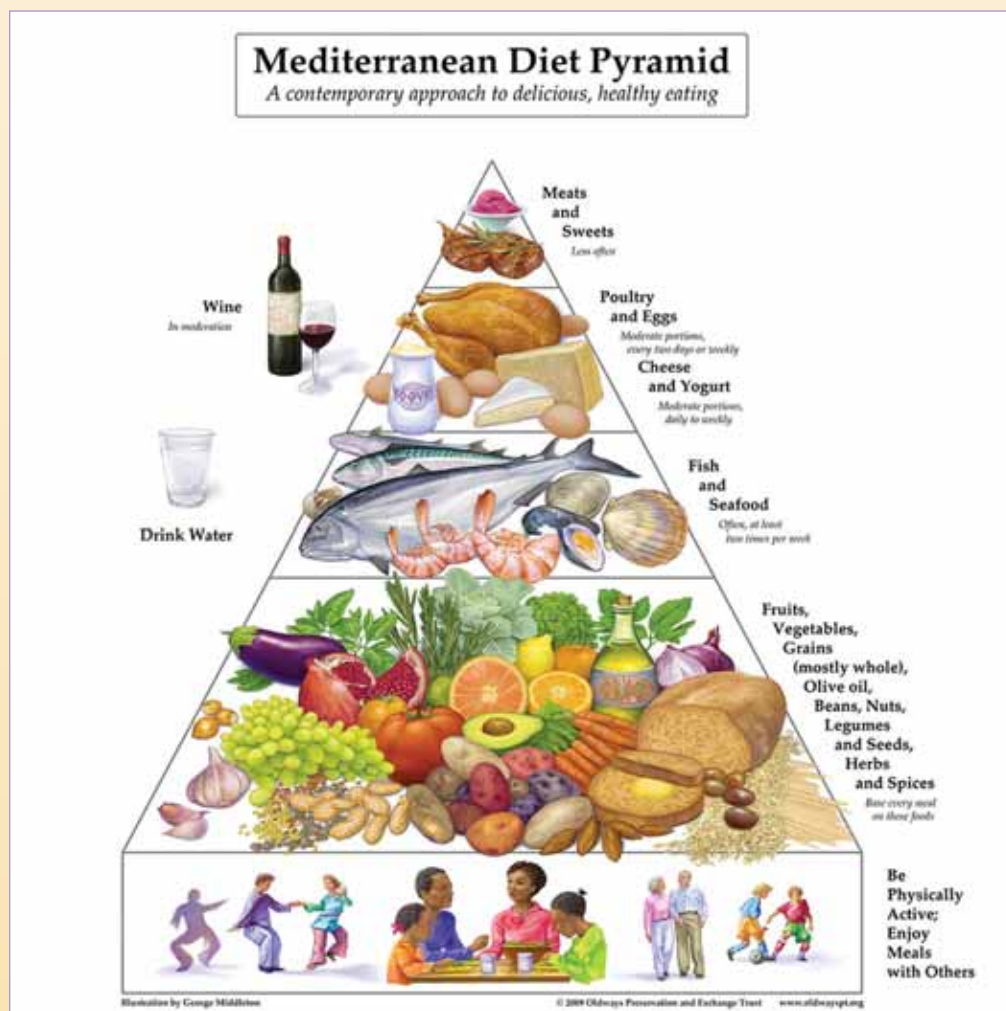
✓ Social Support

One unwritten aspect of the Mediterranean Diet is the strong social bonds that are inherent in these cultures. Food is very important and is meant to be enjoyed at a leisurely pace around a table shared with family and or friends. Shared meals reinforce strong social and familial bonds that are important for emotional and physical well-being.

✓ Anti-Smoking

At the time of these extensive Mediterranean population studies, very few Mediterraneans smoked. These low rates of smoking are believed to have contributed somewhat to the lower incidence of chronic diseases. Smoking and health are not compatible.

If you do decide to adopt the traditional Mediterranean Diet, you'll need to commit to incorporating all aspects of the eating and lifestyle habits. As I said before, there is not one aspect of this diet that makes you healthier than other parts. All parts work together to have a huge positive impact on health. This diet is wonderful because it is so enjoyable; it is comprised of delicious foods that can be made into an array of healthful simple seasonal or ethnic dishes. Visit the Mediterranean: enjoy these wonderful foods, take pleasure in life and welcome the company of others at your table and you can improve your health in the process.



Naked Food of the Month: Sweet Corn

Most summer produce tastes great “naked,” but sweet corn is especially good. It literally needs no additional ingredients if it is fresh and cooked just right.

Corn contains lutein and zeaxanthin, which are carotenoid antioxidants that help protect our eyes and hearts. The same pigments in lutein and zeaxanthin that help give corn its yellow color also contribute the yellow color to our eyes; this yellow pigment in our retinas can help protect against sun damage that can otherwise lead to cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. Studies have shown that lutein helps prevent the build-up of plaque in the arteries, thereby protecting against heart attacks, and zeaxanthin may lower the risk of lung and breast cancers. Corn is also a good source of folic acid, thiamin and vitamin C.

One medium ear of fresh corn has 80 calories, 3 grams of fiber and 10% of your Daily Value for vitamin C.

Corn is technically a grain, but the type of corn that we eat fresh is called sweet corn and it is eaten as a starchy vegetable so it counts as both a starch and a vegetable. Sweet corn has less starch and more sugar than other varieties of corn (usually called field corn), which means that it has great texture and flavor that is perfect for



Corn contains antioxidants that help protect our eyes and hearts.

enjoying raw or lightly cooked. Field corn is used to make animal feed, high-fructose corn syrup, ethanol and corn flour (masa) that is used to make corn tortillas and tortilla chips. Fresh corn is in season in California from May until November, but it is available all year round. You will usually find yellow, white and bi-colored corn varieties, though I recommend the darker yellow ones since they contain greater amounts of lutein and zeaxanthin. Although we do not eat it fresh, blue corn seems to be the most nutritious of all varieties and it has the least starch and most protein. So, if you eat processed corn products like tortilla chips, go with the blue corn (and baked) variety to get the most nutrients.

Once corn is picked, the sugar starts converting to starch, so it is important to keep corn cold to slow the conversion in order for it to stay sweet and juicy. Look for moist green husks that are not dried out.

The kernels at the pointed end should be smaller than the rest of the kernels, but still plump. When you get home, leave the husk on and put corn in the refrigerator right away and eat it as soon as possible. Remove the husk and silk by hand and use a damp towel to gently rub the cob and remove the rest of the silk caught between the kernels. To cut kernels off the cob, place the cob on a cutting board, hold it down with one hand and use a large, sharp knife to cut off a small section in one downward stroke. Rotate the cob so the cut part is on the cutting board and cut the next section. Continue rotating and cutting until all of the kernels have been removed. Corn can be eaten raw in salads and salsas or it can be boiled (for two minutes), roasted or grilled. Since corn is so fibrous, cooking it helps to release some of the nutrients and increase antioxidant power by 44%! Corn pairs well with butter, cheese, chili peppers, chili powder, oregano, paprika, peas and shell beans. This month, try my recipe for Soft Tacos with Corn Salsa & Naked Corn on the Cob.

Read My New Blog!

I want to help you raise healthy eaters, so I have started a blog called *Healthy Families* on our website, www.gelsons.com. I document my experiences and thoughts about feeding my 13-month old daughter and hopefully impart some worthwhile nutritional wisdom to my readers. Please check it weekly and join me on this very important parenting journey.

Jessica's Store Tours*

Body Fat Testing

Friday, July 16

Century City 12:00pm

Monday, July 19

Hollywood 4:00pm

Tuesday, July 20

Pacific Palisades 4:00pm

Thursday, July 22

Marina del Rey 4:00pm

Friday, July 23

Encino 1:00pm

Sherman Oaks 3:30pm

Monday, July 26

Westlake 12:00pm

Calabasas 3:30pm

Friday, July 30

West Hollywood 12:00pm

*Please sign up at the front desk at the store you would like to tour.

BON APPETIT!
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