

The Mediterranean meal plan

Mediterranean dishes make healthy meals. The secrets behind Mediterranean cooking can help you stay healthy and lower your chances for certain health conditions.

There isn't one single diet plan that a person follows. Rather, a Mediterranean meal plan is based on a style of eating that includes more fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, legumes, and fish. It replaces saturated fats, which come mostly from animal products, with healthy fats that come from plant and fish sources.

Research has proven that by eating little or no animal protein, people can lower their risk for heart disease—as well as for certain types of cancer—and maintain a healthier weight. Research also shows that following a Mediterranean meal plan can help people with type 2 diabetes delay the need for medicine to help control blood sugar levels.

Key points of the Mediterranean meal plan include:

- Fruits and vegetables: Make the backbone of every meal.
- Whole grains: Use to round out a plate at mealtime.
- Spices: Add for flavor and nutrients to every meal.
- Beans: Include as a daily staple.
- Nuts: Eat a handful every day, either as a snack or part of a meal.
- Olive and canola oil: Use instead of butter and margarine.
- Dairy products: Eat in moderation.
- Red wine: Enjoy one glass with supper or dinner.
- Chips and dips: Are NOT part of this meal plan.

Here are ways to include choices from the Mediterranean meal plan:

- Choose at least 6 to 7 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Look for brightly colored produce that's in season.
 - Green leafy vegetables are full of antioxidants, vitamin C, and folic acid. Eat 1 to 2 servings of green leafy vegetables, such as kale, spinach, and leafy salad greens, each day.
 - Include salads with most meals.
 - Use tomatoes in salads and flavorful sauces.
 - Don't count iceberg lettuce or French fries as a vegetable serving.
 - Limit potatoes to one serving a week.
 - Choose fruit for dessert. Buy fresh melons, berries, oranges, apples, pears, plums, apricots, peaches, papaya, and mangos when they're in season. Many of these are also great frozen.
- Eat at least one serving of beans a day. This could be in soups and salads, as a side dish, such as a multi-bean salad, or as a main dish.

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- Eat 5 to 6 servings of whole grains per day.
 - Look for whole grain pasta, crackers, dense whole grain breads, and grains you can cook, such as couscous, bulgur wheat, and brown or wild rice.
 - For breakfast, eat whole grain cereal or whole grain bread with low-sugar jam or nut butter, instead of butter or margarine.
- Limit meat and poultry to one serving or less per week. You can have 1 to 2 servings of fish per week.
- Cook with garlic and herbs. Use fresh and dried herbs, especially oregano, rosemary, thyme, and basil, to season your dishes whenever you can.
- Only use olive oil and canola oil for cooking. Choose breads and other baked goods made with these oils. Cut butter and margarine out of your meal plan. Avoid peanut, safflower, corn, and soybean oils.
- Eat a handful of nuts every day. Sprinkle a tablespoon of chopped or whole nuts over salad, pasta and vegetable dishes. Choose almonds, hazelnuts, and walnuts.
- Serve non-fat milk on breakfast cereal. Enjoy 1 to 2 teaspoons of grated hard cheese, such as Parmesan, over pasta. Avoid cream, whole and 2% milk, and regular cheese.
- If you drink alcohol, have a glass of red wine with a meal. Avoid other kinds of alcohol and only drink red wine with a meal. Limit alcohol to 1 glass of red wine a day for women, and 2 glasses of red wine a day for men.

Serving sizes

- Fruit and vegetables: ½ cup fresh or cooked; a whole piece of produce like 1 apple or 1 tomato
- Grains: ½ cup of cooked pasta, rice, or other grain; a slice of whole grain bread
- Beans: ½ cup cooked
- Garlic: 1 to 2 cloves a day
- Herbs, dried or fresh: ¼ to ½ teaspoon a day
- Oils: Limit to ½ teaspoon for each serving size when cooking

For more information

Visit the Health and Wellness Resources section on the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa for more information about diabetes and other health topics.