

Mediterranean Diet: The Essential Guide To The Mediterranean Diet

Diet Motivation & Healthy Meals

By: Jen Watson

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Introduction

Looking to change things up on your plate? With our modern age diets, we all go through this phase of exploring out of our current not-so-healthy pastures and seeking out healthier ones.

Everyone has his or her reasons for shifting to the health bandwagon—from weight issues to health problems. And, some of us just want to feel better and live a happier, fuller life. That said, your reasons for wanting to change your diet are secondary concerns. What matters most is understanding that this isn't a nag for change, but a sign your current dietary lifestyle needs changing. After all, what you put on your plate matters a lot.

If you're like most Americans, you've probably seen your fair share of formidable plates. Breakfast starts with bowls of sugary cereals, doughnuts or stacked up pancakes covered with a healthy dose of maple-flavored syrup. By the time you're done with breakfast, you've already prepped your body with food to reduce your daily health levels. As the saying goes: You can't outrun a bad habit.

There's a silver lining in all this, however. You don't need to outrun a bad habit when you can defeat it. Once you stop feeling the need to run, you're more likely to enjoy the current life you have. And that's exactly where the Mediterranean diet comes in.

This revolutionary diet has gained an increasing popularity within the health-sphere for a variety of reasons. We're going to dive into each and every reason so that you will understand the benefits this has to offer you. But, before we jump head first; we're going to look at the roots of the Mediterranean diet in Chapter 1. After that, we'll dip our toes in and check out the kinds of foods this diet promotes. Getting the basics down is quite important to really understand where all the benefits of this diet lie. After we're done with all the essential talk, we'll look at the different advantages this diet has to offer in Chapter 3. Lastly, Chapter 4 and 5 will explore how you can get started on the Mediterranean diet and how you can maintain it for healthy living.

Ready to start learning? Head on over to chapter one and let's begin adding some healthy goodness in your life.

Chapter 1: Origins Of The Mediterranean Diet

To really change the way you eat, you should understand what healthy eating entails. So let's make a few clarifications here. The Mediterranean diet is more than just a simple restrictive course meal you follow for a period of time. It's not a quick measure, but a lasting one.

How do we know?

Because while we refer to it as revolutionary, it's not something new to the world. It's been around for decades within the area it's named after, The Mediterranean. So you're not adopting a low result diet to which you're a guinea pig. But a lifestyle which many before you and many currently living in the world with you are taking advantage of as of this moment.

The Mediterranean Diet is, however, revolutionary for the western world. We've grown accustomed to the kinds of foods sold to us through corporations which eye our pockets more than our waists. With the Mediterranean diet, you'll be able to break out of the bad cycle you've created and take on life with all the zeal and energy you're meant to have.

That said, changing your lifestyle is a commitment. It's understandable if you have questions regarding whether this diet is for you. In reality, only you can answer that by exploring what this diet has to offer you. This book will provide you with all of that information. The very first concern individuals adopting an older lifestyle have: Will this diet suit me?

For that, we need to take a trip down memory lane and find our way back to present times.

History of the Mediterranean Diet

As we've previously mentioned, this diet is named after its area of origin. While this entire region includes Spain, Morocco, Monaco, Turkey, Libya and the like; the Mediterranean diet finds its roots in Spain, Greece and Southern Italy in particular. These nations, their culture, history, and food had the biggest influence in developing this healthy, enriching diet.

During the Prehistoric Age, these countries survived through hunting and farming animals. This form of sustenance isn't the most efficient, and the entire region shifted to agricultural farming during the Bronze Age. While animals were still consumed, the poor economies of this region meant locals had to survive on fruits they labored themselves. Within agriculture's ease, farming became a primary source of food for this region throughout history and even today.

In fact, cities were built keeping in mind this agricultural need, and you'll see this reflected in their architecture as well. A thousand years ago, locals had piled strong lava stones to construct walls which curved their islands. With the intent to protect their soil from erosion and help it maintain all the nourishment it had, terraced hills were created along slopes. Given how these systems still exist today, you can see the dedication put into their lifestyle.

But none of this arose in isolation. Countries and cities within the Mediterranean zone have diverse food palettes in the reflection of their diverse history. This cuisine, in particular, takes inspiration from every ethnic culture from Arabian to Italian; and builds into its own entity. These regions were a crossroads for many civilizations and cultures, all of which have an influence on their culture today and all the dishes these areas produced.

You'd have settlers from North Africa springing these areas to life as early as 3000 BC. A range of civilizations and religious cultures fluttering through and leaving all their uniqueness as they stayed or left. For example, Southern Italy did not grow grapes and citrus trees. With their land and agricultural innovations, it wasn't possible to naturally grow these plants. That changed when Muslim farmers came to the land around 860 AD and developed techniques which allowed their growth and nourishment.

These areas have changed hands so many times, getting anything less than a variety of tastes would leave anyone in awe. So you have a lifestyle diet constructed through careful and natural agricultural techniques which acted as sustenance to many different cultures. But that's not why it's sustainable for us in the modern day as well. Let's explore a bit more.

Geography and the Mediterranean Diet

We're often told we've developed certain food habits through evolution and changing it could be pretty harmful. That is, adopting certain diets from other countries can be damaging. But if the Mediterranean's history doesn't prove otherwise, just gloss over the region's geography.

Most Mediterranean areas where this diet originates from weren't high on arable land and were prone to extreme climates—often with erratic rainfall. Couple that with winds and you have an environment which does not support agriculture naturally.

This diet was, in fact, a result of a man-made change. As we've previously stated, Muslim farmers brought with them a fair share of innovation which helped this region diversify their land. But perhaps the biggest indicator itself is found in their current topography.

In other to adapt their land for certain agricultural uses, the people of these regions carved their land to support the growth of such crops. Their hills were transformed into terraces which provide a unique ecosystem to this region. Tourists marvel at their hills, yet few know how these were once man-made constructions. Many cities used lava stones to form walls around their islands to facilitate soil protection from erosion. Not to mention, keep the area as moisture and nutrition filled as possible. That is how they were able to grow grapevines and caper plants.

So there were a lot of things unnatural to the land which helped the people there flourish naturally. The region's climate, however, is reflective of more Western nations today. We're good on this front as well.

Lifestyle of Mediterranean People

To cover all our tracks, we'll glean over general lifestyle aspects mostly found in this region. As mentioned, the region is filled with diversity and various cultures, but they do typically have a few lifestyle characteristics in common. For one, the people have a tradition of working hard and are thus able to continue their efforts of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

A very common feature of the Mediterranean lifestyle is their family togetherness. Meals are often eaten with others which have hidden health benefits. For one, you can eat as much or as little as you like. Most American meals have separate portions for all. Meaning: You finish what you've taken out or else it's going to look bad. With a more family-sized serving, you're not restricting or over-compensating for what's on your plate and focusing on just as much as you'd like to eat.

Disease and obesity are also considered to be low in this region. According to OECD, only 1 in 10 people is considered obese within Italy. That number is strikingly low when compared to more western nations. Somewhat a reflection of their light, but nutrition filled meals, and less stressful lives are some of the explanations.

The facts are simple. It does not matter which angle you look at it from; a Mediterranean diet is perfectly adaptable for most individuals. It has been around for quite some time. And thus, tried and tested for centuries. You're not risking your health, just improving it. In fact, you don't even need to hunt out special groceries which are essential to your core diet. Given its diverse nature, the Mediterranean diet requires nothing special which ranks up its cost and is pretty affordable—especially given its long-term health benefits.

If all your concerns are tackled, the next chapter contains all the information you need to understand what this diet entails.

Chapter 2: Typical Food Types Used In Mediterranean Diet

From the previous chapter, you might've already guessed this diet doesn't grip you very tightly when it comes to food. There are plenty of healthy options available for you to try and avail. Especially given the diverse nature of how the diet was formed over time. You're mostly allowed to eat nearly everything—it all just needs to be used in healthy ways. You basically fine tune your food to make nutritious and healthy meals instead of stopping yourself from eating and enjoying meals.

While we're going to dive into getting started in Chapter 4, it's important to understand the kinds of food you'll be consuming to see the real potential of this diet.

All that said, there are a few things within certain food types you're better forgoing as a whole. Some are puffed up calories, while others damage your body. A Mediterranean diet wouldn't be as effective in its efforts to regenerate your health to its optimum levels if these kinds of foods were to be consumed on a frequent basis. Take a moment and browse through to check if you're consuming some of these undesirable foods.

Foods to avoid

- **Fast food** – This easily avoidable, harmful, treat has been there for your quick hunger pangs; but it's not doing you any favors. Most fast foods are very damaging to your health. Your coffee has too much sugar, your cheese has the wrong kind of fats, and most other things have too much salt to justify consumption. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, two in every three adults are considered to be obese or overweight in the United States. That's not a pretty picture—especially given most Americans eat out or consume similar snacks at home nearly five times each week. So, if you want to start improving your health, this is the first thing you want to reduce.
- **Sweeteners** – While a Mediterranean diet provides alternatives when it comes to sweeteners, good ol' white sugar and the like should be taken out. From creating a blood sugar imbalance to causing obesity, sugar is the diet enemy number one. It's easy to see a small spoon and think nothing of it, but those small spoons can be pretty harmful in the long run as they may lead to sugar addiction. That said, those who have developed a small sweet

tooth doesn't worry much. This lifestyle does provide plenty of treating options—just with healthier sweeteners.

- Soft drinks – Some of the same reasons as sugars apply here, but soft drinks are condensed form of sugar with some other harmful ingredients. According to JAMA, fructose-rich beverages can increase the risk of gout in men and women by at least 75%.

These three simple, yet highly damaging food types are advisable to cut out. As you can probably see, as long as you consume them, you can't heal any previous damage even if you adopt the Mediterranean diet. You'll only increase the harm and reduce the effectiveness of this lifestyle—mooting your struggles.

That said, what should you be having in this diet?

Vegetables

When adopting a Mediterranean lifestyle, you can be generous with the amount of veggies you eat. In fact, it's recommended to eat a large amount of vegetables. You can take a bite from avocados, artichokes, celery, onions, lettuce, tomatoes, broccoli, peas, peppers, sweet potatoes and mushrooms.

Fruits

Likewise, fruits are great sources of nutrients as well. You can have your pick with them. For example, you can eat melons, grapefruits, strawberries, bananas, apples, dates and cherries—to name a few. These can also be used as sweeteners instead of sugar for simple drinks given their natural taste.

Fish and Poultry

A Mediterranean diet shouldn't be excessively based on fish. While the Mediterranean zone consisted of a lot of fish-able areas, agricultural farming was the main focus given the benefits it provided. That said, fish is preferable to red meat which should only be consumed in small amounts. Chicken and turkey are excellent substitutes for your meat needs. There aren't any particular fish you need to avoid.

Grains

Wheat, oats, rice, couscous and barley are perfectly acceptable on this diet. These particular grains contain little to no trans and saturated fat so you're basically on a good level with them. That said, look for whole grains instead of refined carbs.

Nuts

A favorite staple of the Mediterranean diet is nuts, which contains unsaturated fatty acids. They also contain the good kind of fats, namely: Omega 3 fatty acid. Pecans and walnuts should definitely be consumed, but remember that nuts are high in calories. Given their easily consumable nature, it's good to stay within an ounce a day or two. Additionally, try to go for unsweetened or unsalted nuts.

Dairy

Everything from milk to cheese is permitted, but in moderation. That said, opting for low or no fat options instead of full fats is advisable. Nevertheless, such food also needs to be consumed in moderation.

Beverages

The Mediterranean diet doesn't stop you from having any kind of fun. Wine, especially red wine, is permitted within the diet. Usually a glass a day works really well for you. As mentioned you want to avoid any soft drinks and highly sugared fruit juices.

Healthy fats

As we've mentioned before, there are a few healthy fats which are beneficial for our consumption. While fatty items, such as butter and margarine, are not consumed daily; olive oil is a staple item within the Mediterranean diet. It's often used as a base to prepare food and even a topping to season everything with. Canola oil is something that can be used in place of margarine and vegetable oil as well... Basically anything with unsaturated fatty acids goes!

The food types that was mentioned above are your building blocks. They're the structure your entire lifestyle will be standing over, and they're going to be your main sources of food. So undoubtedly, you must be wondering all the benefits these foods provide you, and that's exactly what we're diving into next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Science Behind The Mediterranean Diet

We've been gushing about the Mediterranean diet for the past few chapters, and it's time to learn why. Being a lifestyle, instead of a simple diet, we're not looking for simple short term benefits, but rather long-term benefits. Not to mention, any improvements you might see won't last. But what are these improvements or benefits in store for Mediterranean diet practitioners?

Weight loss and the Mediterranean Diet

For many, and perhaps even you, one of the biggest motivators for a dietary lifestyle change is having a weight loss goal. Exercise helps, but you can only tone your muscles with it. Real weight loss happens in the kitchen, or on your plate to be more precise. What you feed yourself does make a huge difference and the Mediterranean diet is here to help. But let's put some research to our cause!

Three studies have really highlighted the Mediterranean lifestyle through their extensive research process during their examination period. All three studied the adoption of Mediterranean diet for various types of people.

Study 1¹ conducted by JAMA, studied the relationship between this lifestyle and metabolic rate. The results showed a rather significant difference in performance, especially when compared to a low-fat control group.

Study 2 conducted by Ann Intern Med looked at improved between the Mediterranean diet and diabetic patients who were overweight. This study was conducted for 4 years straight and showed positive results for Mediterranean style diets.

Study 3² was conducted by The New England Journal of Medicine. This was a battle between three diet: Mediterranean, low-fat and restricted calorie diet. The result matched those of the previous two; whereby the former diet proved much more effective than the latter.

It's fairly clear that a Mediterranean-style diet does provide a much better environment for nurturing health and weight loss.

¹ Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Ogden CL. Prevalence of obesity and trends in the distribution of body mass index among US adults, 1999–2010. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2012;

² Estruch R, et al. Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease with a Mediterranean Diet. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 2013.

Heart Disease and the Mediterranean Diet

In 2013, PREDIME Study³ made headlines for its spectacular results. This was a large study with around 7447 at risk patients suffering from heart disease and continued for a period of 5 years. They were three groups:

1. Mediterranean diet with added extra virgin oil
2. Mediterranean diet with added nuts
3. A low fat diet

There was no reduction of calories and no increase of exercise. The result? Both Mediterranean diet groups reduced the risk of stroke, heart attacks, and death from cardiovascular diseases. While the olive oil group saw a 30% drop, the nuts group wasn't that far behind with a 28%. What of the control low-fat diet group? It saw little to no change in risk of heart issues. This extensive study has been a solid base for the adoption of this lifestyle for heart disease patients. After all, the results are very encouraging for patients and their families.

Diabetes and the Mediterranean Diet

As with the others, there's been significant research when it comes to diabetes and this diet. We do have an encouraging Ann Intern Med study to support the incorporation of a Mediterranean style diet for diabetes patients.

That said, in another PREDIMED study, 418 patients who were at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Only 10% of the Mediterranean diet group developed diabetes, whereas 18% of the low-fat group got diabetes. To put matters in perspectives, the Mediterranean diet helped avoid type 2 diabetes by 52%.

Cancer and the Mediterranean Diet

PREDIMED, in their effort to ensure valid research, has even studied the effects of Mediterranean nutrition and cancer. This is a disease where causalities are normally given, especially since diagnosis isn't always prompt. To ensure validity, around 7216 cancer patients were studied.

After the allotted 5 year period, 323 individuals had died; with 81 from heart related disease, while the rest died from cancer. The group consuming nuts showed the most significant change with around 16-63% lowered death risks through this study's period.

³ Ramón Estruch, M.D., Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease with a Mediterranean Diet, 2013;

Alzheimer's disease and the Mediterranean Diet

As with protecting and helping the heart to function properly, this diet helps to provide rich nutrients which improve brain function. Those at risk of Alzheimer's can see pretty significant difference in their risks than those who don't follow the Mediterranean diet.

However, not all functions can be improved. Alzheimer's cannot be reversed, but JAMA⁴ has concluded Mediterranean foods can help slow cognitive decline for older adults and reduce risk of mild cognitive impairment. It even has shown good signs in reducing progression so those effected by Alzheimer's have more time.

Making healthy choices always pays off, and you can't really go wrong with this diet. It's easy to follow and maintain—something we're going to explore in the coming chapters. Making the right choice means starting to pick healthier alternatives. Let's explore how you can take advantage of all these benefits.

⁴ Mayo Clinic Glenn Smith Ph.D May 20, 2015 Alzheimer's: Can a Mediterranean diet lower my risk?

Chapter 4: Maintaining Nutrition When on the Mediterranean Diet

It all starts today. Improving your health means every bite you take counts. Each good and each bad bite has an effect on you—whether small or big. Getting in control is the most important step.

That said, with everything being an open buffet within this diet, you might be wondering if it'll actually help. This isn't done through restricting yourself from food, but strategically choosing what you eat.

In the simplest terms, we start with a pyramid whose base is the most essential and daily things you need. As you move on to the top, the less frequently you need to feed your body that particular food item.

This base would typically start with some physical activity through exercise. You can take your pick, but having a healthy amount of activity is required to achieve any kind of health level. Next, it's advisable to have items any of the following items on a daily bases:

- whole grain
- pasta
- rice
- couscous
- potatoes
- barley

It's also recommended to have around 8 portions of fruits. Incorporate beans, legumes or nuts. And add in a whole lot of vegetables into the mix. Additionally, cheese, yogurt and milk can be taken daily as well. Be generous with your olive oil.

Next we have a few items which should be taken weekly. They're good for you, but taking them in large quantities isn't healthy and that overdose will lead to things you're trying to avoid. Again, you're not exactly being very strict with these, you're just making sure you include them once a week. These foods include:

- Fish
- Poultry
- Eggs
- Sweets

Meats are the only thing in your diet which should be consumed weekly only. They're good for you but you're getting your proteins through other means so there's nothing to really worry about.

Lastly, wine can be drunk in moderation. As mentioned, typically a glass a day works well.

With all this mentioned, you might be wondering how much should you be having of all this? The nutritional value of these types of foods should be the same as you're generally recommended to follow. That includes:

| Nutrient | Quantity Per Day |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Energy, kJ | 8,700 kilojoules |
| Energy, kCal | 2100 Kcal |
| Protein | 50 grams |
| Fat | 70 grams |
| Carbohydrates | 310 grams |
| Sugars | 90 grams |
| Sodium (salt) | 2.3 grams |
| Dietary Fiber | 30 grams |
| Saturated Fatty Acids | 24 grams |

This should be your base; i.e. don't attempt to hit below this level. Instead this is your minimum range to consume per day. As for minerals, vitamins and all that jazz, this is what your daily goal should look like:

| Vitamins & Minerals | Quantities Per Day |
|---|---------------------------|
| Biotin (B-complex) | 30 µg |
| Folate (B-complex) | 400 µg |
| Vitamin A | 600 µg |
| Vitamin B₁ (thiamin) | 1,4 mg |
| Vitamin B₂ (riboflavin) | 1,6 mg |
| Vitamin B₃ (niacin) | 18 mg |
| Vitamin B₅ (pantothenic acid) | 6 mg |
| Vitamin B₆ (pyridoxine) | 2 mg |
| Vitamin B₁₂ (cobalamine) | 6 µg |

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) | 75 mg |
| Vitamin D (cholecalciferol) | 5 µg |
| Vitamin E (tocopherol) | 10 mg |
| Vitamin K | 80 µg |
| Boron | < 20 mg |
| Calcium | 1000 mg |
| Chlorine | 3400 mg |
| Chromium | 120 µg |
| Copper | 2 mg |
| Fluorine | 3,5 mg |
| Iodine | 150 µg |
| Iron | 15 mg |
| Magnesium | 350 mg |
| Manganese | 5 mg |
| Molybdenum | 75 µg |
| Nickel | < 1 mg |
| Phosphorus | 1000 mg |
| Potassium | 3500 mg |
| Selenium | 35 µg |
| Sodium | 2400 mg |
| Vanadium | < 1,8 mg |
| Zinc | 15 mg |

NOTE: *The amount of kCal, vitamins, minerals, etc, are strongly dependent on your weight, age, and gender. Please consolidate a more advanced tool to determine your optimal intake of calories, vitamins, and minerals.*

If you're looking to pursue a weight loss goal with this diet, it'll take you a little more. You see, our body requires a certain amount of calories in order to stay healthy and keep us fit, if we're eating more than that share, those calories are stored as fat in our body. A small candy bar can equal a bowl of green-y veggies, so we have to be careful about what we eat. Calories aren't only important in that way. In fact, when we want to lose weight, we're actually looking to burn calories. Calories are burnt through exercising or naturally used by your body. Hence if you're looking to lose weight, counting calories is a highly effective method to use. In many cases, this is our first step towards a healthier, fitter life.

Don't know where to start? You can give *My Fitness Pal*—a fitness website, calorie counter, fitness tracker, community and smartphone app. This nifty little

app has the power to help you keep on track with your diet, keep on track of your daily calories and even nutritional values, to ensure you get healthy amounts of food every day. Give this free app a try if you're starting out with this diet.

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