



Overview of the Mediterranean diet

The Mediterranean diet does not regard all fat as bad. In fact, the focus of the diet is not to limit total fat consumption, but rather to make wise choices about the type of fat in the diet. Our modern diet contains at least five types of fat (table 2). Like the AHA diet, the Mediterranean diet is low in saturated fat. However, it views two types of fat--omega-3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fats--as healthy and places no restrictions on their consumption. The omega-3 fatty acids are found in fatty fish (i.e., salmon, trout, sardines, tuna) and in some plant sources (ie., walnuts and other tree nuts, flaxseed, various vegetables). Monounsaturated fat is abundant in olive oil, nuts, and avocados.

Type of fat*	Effect on heart	Sources
Saturated	Atherogenic	Red meat, butter, cheese, milk
Monounsaturated	Cardioprotective	Olive oil, canola oil, nuts
Polyunsaturated		
<input type="checkbox"/> Omega-3 fatty acids	Cardioprotective	Fish, vegetables, nuts
<input type="checkbox"/> Omega-6 oils	Neutral	Cooking oils (eg, corn, soybean, sunflower)
<i>Trans</i> -unsaturated**		
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Trans</i> -fatty acids	Atherogenic	Processed foods containing partially hydrogenated oil

*Current food labels list only total fat and saturated fat. The Mediterranean diet includes plenty of healthy fats, such as omega-3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fat. The diet discourages consumption of saturated fats and hydrogenated oils (*trans*-fatty acids), both of which contribute to heart disease.

**Hydrogenation process involves heating omega-6 oils to high temperatures, which forms *trans*-fatty acids.

The Mediterranean heart-healthy diet

The Mediterranean diet is one of the easiest diets to adopt and maintain on a long-term basis because it does not require radical restriction of total amounts of fat or carbohydrate. Calorie intake should be appropriate for maintaining a normal body weight. Follow these guidelines.

- Eat an abundance of natural, whole plant foods, including fruits, vegetables, and salads. Try for seven to ten servings daily.
- Include whole-grain, high-fiber breads and whole-grain pasta in your meals and snacks.
- Keep saturated fat to a minimum: choose chicken, lean cuts of red meat, and nonfat dairy products, and use butter and cheese in moderation.

- Incorporate fatty fish in your diet, especially salmon, sardines, trout, and tuna. These are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.
- Use olive oil as a source of monounsaturated fat.
- Eat frequent servings of peas, beans, legumes, and nuts.
- Drink low to moderate amounts of alcohol. Wine, especially red wine, is a good choice. Consumption should be limited to one drink daily for women, two drinks daily for men.

Avoid the following:

- Foods high in sugar
- Trans*-fatty acids, which are found in processed foods labeled as containing "partially hydrogenated" oil
- Processed "starchy" carbohydrates, such as food made with white flour
- Oils high in omega-6 fatty acids, such as corn, sunflower, safflower, soybean, or peanut oil

Category	Consume	Avoid
Fruits and vegetables	Wide variety of whole fruits and vegetables; try for at least 7-10 servings per day	Vegetables prepared in butter or cream sauces
High-fiber breads, cereals, and pasta	Whole-grain bread and cereal, bran, brown rice	Sweets, white bread, biscuits, breadsticks, and other refined carbohydrates
Protein that is low in saturated fat	Lean cuts of meat (fat trimmed) or poultry (no skin); low-fat dairy foods (skim milk, yogurt)	Bacon, sausage, other processed or high-fat meat, milk or cheese that is not low-fat, ice cream
Fish or other source of omega-3 fatty acids, at least 1 or 2 times per wk	Salmon, trout, herring, water-packed tuna, mackerel (or fish oil supplement); flaxseed, spinach, walnuts	Fried fish (except when pan-fried in olive oil)
Healthy oils for cooking, salad dressing, and other uses	Extra-virgin olive oil, canola oil, flaxseed oil ("high-oleic" sunflower or safflower oil may also be an option)	Omega-6 oils (corn, sunflower, safflower, soybean, peanut)
Peas, beans, legumes, and nuts	Soybeans, lentils, or any kind of peas, beans, or legumes; tree nuts (e.g., almonds, pecans, walnuts, Brazil nuts)	Heavily salted or honey-roasted nuts; stale or rancid nuts
Alcohol	One 5-oz glass of wine, a 12-oz beer, or a 1.5-oz drink containing distilled spirits with the evening meal	Limit to no more than 1 drink daily for women, 2 drinks daily for men
Fat	Emphasize whole, natural foods as above; look for " <i>trans</i> -fatty acid-free" margarine and snack foods	Fast food, fried food, margarine, chips, crackers, baked goods, doughnuts, any processed food made with partially hydrogenated oil

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