

## Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

# Mediterranean diet

### What is a Mediterranean diet?

A Mediterranean diet focuses on plant foods like fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, and pulses, like, beans, chickpeas and lentils. The diet includes moderate amounts of lean proteins like fish and chicken and low-fat dairy foods. Olive oil is used to replace other oils and fats in the diet.

### What benefits could a Mediterranean diet provide?

- Weight loss – plants are naturally lower in calories and high in fibre, which helps you feel fuller for longer
- Reduced risk of having a heart attack or stroke – replacing saturated fat, found mostly in meat and dairy, with healthier fats in nuts and olive oil, lowers your cholesterol levels. This is good for your heart and blood vessels
- Diabetes – eating a diet rich in plants can help prevent type 2 diabetes. For people with diabetes (type 1, type 2 and gestational), it can help lower blood glucose levels and may allow them to reduce their medication
- Reduced blood pressure
- Lower risk of developing certain cancers - bowel, breast, prostate, stomach, bladder, head and neck, lung and pancreatic cancer
- Lower risk of developing dementia
- Better balance of good gut bacteria, which can lead to better digestion
- Improved mood and mental health

• Better sleep



### Benefits of Mediterranean diets (continued)

- Environmentally friendly – Mediterranean diets have a lower impact on the environment due to lower greenhouse emissions, and less land and water use



### Hints and tips



Mediterranean diets usually have a lot more fibre than you may be used to eating. A sudden increase in fibre may cause gas, bloating and changes in bowel habits.

To avoid these problems:

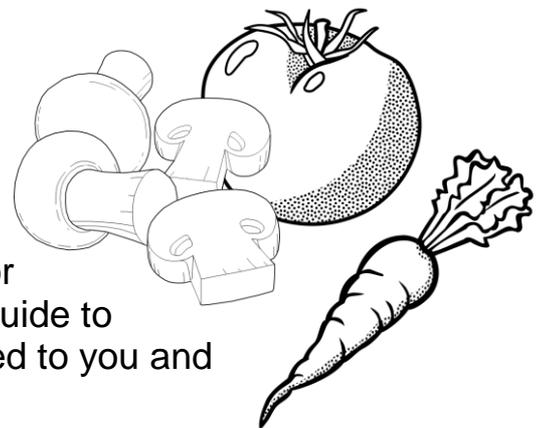
- slowly increase the amount of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses over several weeks
- make sure you are keeping hydrated – at least 8 cups of fluids throughout the day.



You should let your doctor or healthcare team know if you are making very significant changes to your diet as they might need to review your medication.

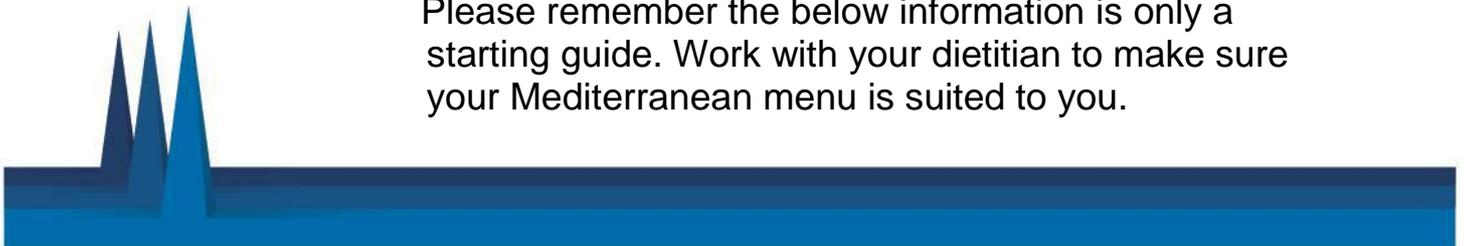
### What to eat on a Mediterranean diet?

The tables on the next two pages provide you with the basic principles of a Mediterranean diet. People have different nutritional needs. There is not one meal plan that will be suitable for everyone. The tables can be used as a starting guide to help you plan your meals, but it must be tailored to you and your needs.



Choose the lower number of servings if you are a smaller build, do not have much daily physical activity (e.g. you are mostly sitting down or lying for long periods) or if you are trying to lose weight. Choose the higher number of servings if your body is a bigger build, you are more active, or you are trying to gain weight.

Please remember the below information is only a starting guide. Work with your dietitian to make sure your Mediterranean menu is suited to you.



## Patient Information

### Foods to include daily:

Food group	Servings per day	Serving size	Examples
Starchy	6 - 8	1 slice of bread 30g dry cereal ½ fist-sized amount cooked rice, pasta or cereal	Wholemeal (and granary) bread/roll/pita bread/chapatti, whole wheat pasta, porridge oats, All-bran, brown rice, plain popcorn, whole-wheat couscous
Vegetables	4 - 5	1 large handful of raw leafy vegetables 3 heaped tablespoons = ½ cup of raw or cooked vegetables	Broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, spring greens, kale, broad beans, spinach, tomatoes, celery, cucumber, courgette, rocket, lettuce, sweetcorn, etc.
Fruit	3 - 4	1 handful = 1 medium fruit, or 2 small pieces of fruit 1 tablespoon of dried fruit	Apples, pears, bananas, grapes, apricots, oranges, satsumas, grapefruit, mango, melon, peach, strawberries, blueberries Raisins, apricots, dates
Low-fat dairy or alternatives	2	1 cup of milk 1 small pot of yoghurt matchbox size of cheese	Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, fortified soya, oat or almond milk, reduced-fat cheese, low-fat and low-sugar or light/diet yoghurt
Nuts and seeds	1 - 2	handful or 30g 2 level tablespoons of nut butter	Almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, mixed nuts, sunflower seeds, unsweetened peanut butter, tahini
Unsaturated fats and oils	1 - 3	1 teaspoon of spread or oil 1 tablespoon of dressing	Olive oil, rapeseed oil, vegetable oil, olive oil spread, soft margarine, low-fat mayonnaise, light salad dressing



## Patient information

### Foods to include weekly:

Food group	Servings per week	Serving size	Examples
Beans, chickpeas, lentils	2 or more	3 tablespoons	Kidney beans, cannellini beans, butter beans, pinto beans, green or red lentils, split peas, chickpeas, hummus
Fish	2 or more	140g or the size of your hand	One serving should be oily fish like salmon, mackerel, sardines, pilchards, kipper
White meat	2	60g or the size of your palm	chicken and turkey without the skin
Eggs	2 - 4	1 egg	
Lean red meat	Less than 2	60g or the size of your palm	Pork, lamb, beef - choose leaner cuts and remove visible fat
Processed meat	1 or less	60g or the size of your palm	Bacon, sausage, ham, pepperoni, chorizo, pastrami
Potatoes	3 or less	½ potato or 2-3 new potatoes	sweet potato, new potatoes, jacket potato with the skin
Sweets and added sugars	Less than 2	1 tablespoon of sugar/jam 1 cup of sugary drink 1 small treat	Sugar (white/ brown/ demerara/ coconut), honey, boiled sweets, biscuits, chocolate, maple syrup, agave syrup, sorbet, ice cream, cake, fruit juice

### What to drink on a Mediterranean diet?

Drink at least 8 cups of fluids per day. This can be water and tea without sugar. Red wine has been shown to have a small benefit for heart disease, but alcohol can still increase your risk of cancer. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation and aim to have a few alcohol-free days every week. The recommended weekly maximum is 14 units of alcohol for both men and women. This is the equivalent of 6 pints of regular strength lager, or about one and a half bottles of wine, or 14 single shots of spirits throughout the week.



## Patient Information

### Cooking methods

- Use less fat when cooking, and switch to unsaturated options where possible, for example olive oil, rapeseed oil or vegetable oil
- Boiling, baking or steaming are some of the healthiest cooking methods
- Casseroles and stir fries are easy ways to include more vegetables in your meals
- Spice it up - herbs and spices such as pepper, mustard, garlic, mint, basil, cumin, ginger, boost flavour and lessen the need for salt

### Further information

Combining a healthy diet with physical activity will provide further benefits to your health. There are great free resources to help you get more active. You can ask your healthcare team for more information or visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-your-way/> or scan the QR code with your phone:



### Useful contacts

#### Diabetes Dietitians Coventry

Contact No: 024 7696 6161

#### Diabetes Dietitian Rugby

Contact No: 01788 663242

This leaflet was produced by Coventry Dietitians, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust. If you would like further information, they can be contacted on tel. 024 7696 6161

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