

The Mediterranean Diet: The Power of Food¹

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Overview of the Mediterranean Lifestyle

The Mediterranean diet dates back to the early 1960s, in which the population living among the Mediterranean basin, much of Greece and Southern Italy consumed high amounts of fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, and unprocessed cereals with minimal consumption of meat (Trichopoulou et al. 2014). This dietary pattern has been shown to improve heart health, maintain weight, and reduce the risk for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes (Bach-Faig et al. 2011; Grosso et al. 2017; Salas Salvado et al. 2014). This publication discusses the Mediterranean dietary pattern and tips to incorporate this lifestyle into daily life, as well as sample recipes.

Mediterranean Dietary Pattern

Table 1 below illustrates the Mediterranean-style dietary pattern based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This dietary pattern emphasizes consuming more plant-based foods, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and limiting the amount of animal proteins, such as poultry and red meat, to no more than 5 to 6.5 ounces daily. The traditional Mediterranean dietary pattern typically includes olive oil, a heart healthy fat, at main meals and olives, nuts and seeds at least once daily. Additionally, wine is included; however, it should be limited to no more than 4 ounces per day for males and 2 to 4 ounces per day for females (Trichopoulou et al. 2014).

How to Create Your Personal Mediterranean Diet

Start Simple

Set a goal each week to make small changes towards health, such as:

- Choose at least one piece of fruit daily for a week.
- Prepare at least one meal with vegetables and whole grains this week.
- Incorporate ½ cup of beans into your meals daily for a week.

Setting Yourself Up for Success

- Use the suggested recipes in this publication for ideas and inspiration for healthy Mediterranean eating.
- Start making changes with a friend or family member! It can be helpful to have support.
- Ask for help from a health professional, such as a registered dietitian, to make those positive changes.

Overall, the Mediterranean dietary pattern focuses on consuming more plant-based food, such as grain, fruits, and vegetables, and consuming less animal-based food, such as poultry and red meat. This type of diet has been shown to improve heart health and may potentially reduce the risk for other chronic diseases. If you are interested in adapting to this type of dietary pattern, start slowly, because small steps help maintain lifestyle change.

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Mediterranean Diet Recipe Ideas—Day 1

Breakfast

Mediterranean Toast

Serving: 1

Price per serving: \$2.06

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 1 slice whole wheat bread
- 1 tbsp. homemade hummus*
- ¼ avocado, mashed
- 3 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 3 Greek olives, sliced
- 1 hard-boiled egg, sliced
- 1 ½ tsp. crumbled feta cheese

Instructions

1. Toast the slice of bread.
2. Top it with the 1 tbsp. hummus, and ¼ mashed avocado.
3. Add the sliced cherry tomatoes and olives.
4. Add the sliced hardboiled egg.
5. Sprinkle the feta on top.
6. Season with salt and pepper.

*Homemade hummus recipe can be found on page 5.

Lunch

Italian Chicken Wrap

Serving: 1

Price per serving: \$2.53

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 1 large tortilla
- 5–6 slices cooked skinless, boneless chicken breast
- 3 ounces of arugula
- 1 slice provolone cheese
- 3–4 slices of tomato
- 5 Greek olives, sliced
- ¼ cup sliced red onion
- Balsamic vinaigrette

Instructions

1. Lay the tortilla on a flat surface.
2. Place the chicken on the tortilla.
3. Add a strip of arugula, then the provolone cheese and the tomato.
4. Top with olives and sliced red onion.

5. Lightly drizzle the balsamic vinaigrette.

6. Tightly roll and wrap the sandwich.

Dinner

Salmon Bruschetta

Serving: 6

Price per serving: \$2.89

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 6 pieces (3 oz/piece) Atlantic salmon
- 6 tbsp. balsamic vinaigrette
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- Salt/pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- ¼ cup feta cheese
- 1 tomato diced
- ¼ cup green onions
- ¼ cup Greek olives, chopped
- 1 tbsp. fresh basil
- 2 tsp. fresh oregano

Instructions

1. Combine the salmon, balsamic vinaigrette, garlic powder and salt/pepper in a large bowl; let sit for 5 minutes.
2. Bruschetta: combine feta cheese, tomatoes, green onions, olives, basil and oregano in another bowl; set aside.
3. Add oil to stovetop grill, cook salmon for (3–5 minutes) on each side.
4. Top the salmon with the bruschetta.

Mediterranean Diet Recipe Ideas—Day 2

Breakfast

Mediterranean Scrambled Eggs with Spinach, Tomato, and Feta

Serving: 2

Price per serving: \$1.10

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil
- ½ cup tomato, diced
- 1 cup baby spinach
- 3 eggs
- 2 tbsp. feta cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a frying pan on medium heat.
2. Sauté the tomatoes and spinach until the spinach is wilted.
3. Add the eggs; scramble.
4. After 30 seconds, add feta cheese.
5. Continue to cook until the egg is cooked to your preference.
6. Season with salt and pepper.

Lunch

Couscous with Sun-Dried Tomato and Feta

Serving: 4

Price per serving: \$2.32

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- ½ cup pine nuts
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 ½ cup couscous
- 1 can black beans (drained and rinsed)
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ¼ cup chopped green onion

Instructions

1. Toast the pine nuts about 3–4 minutes.
2. Bring 1 ¼ cup water to a boil.
3. Stir in the couscous, olive oil, and kosher salt.
4. Cover, and remove from heat.
5. Let stand for 5 minutes.
6. Fluff the couscous with a fork.

7. Stir in the sun-dried tomatoes, feta cheese, chopped green onion, black beans and pine nuts.

Dinner

Honey-Lime Chicken and Veggies

Serving: 4

Price per serving: \$3.15

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp. honey
- Zest 1 lime
- 4 6-oz chicken breasts
- 1 tsp. cumin
- ½ tsp. paprika
- 1 bunch asparagus
- Salt and pepper
- 2 ears corn, halved
- 2 tbsp. chopped cilantro
- ¼ cup sliced green onion

Instructions

1. Stir the olive oil, garlic, honey and lime zest in a bowl.
2. Place the chicken breasts on foil; season with cumin and paprika.
3. Add asparagus to the foil.
4. Brush the chicken and asparagus with the prepared sauce.
5. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Grill (10 to 12 minutes).
7. 5 minutes before done, add the corn to the grill and cook until browned.
8. Garnish the chicken with cilantro and green onion.

Mediterranean Diet Recipe Ideas—Day 3

Breakfast

Greek Yogurt Fruit Bowl

Serving: 1

Price per serving: \$2.36

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 3 strawberries
- ¼ cup frozen blueberries
- 2 tbsp. granola
- 1 tbsp. raisins
- 1 tsp. honey
- ¼ cup flaked coconut
- ⅛ tsp. vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Place Greek yogurt in a bowl and mix in vanilla extract.
2. Place granola and coconut flakes over half the yogurt bowl.
3. Slice strawberries and place on the other half along with the blueberries.
4. Drizzle honey on top and add raisins.

Lunch

Mediterranean Pasta Salad

Serving: 6–8

Price per serving: \$2.58

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 12 ounces dry farfalle pasta
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1 pint grape tomatoes, halved
- ⅔ cup sliced Greek olives
- 2 cans black beans
- 4 ounces crumbled feta cheese
- half red onion diced

Lemon-Herb Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp. squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tsp. dried oregano, minced
- 1 tsp. honey
- 2 small garlic cloves
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- ¼ tsp salt
- Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes

Instructions

1. Cook the pasta in a large pot, according to package instructions.
2. Drain pasta, then rinse under cold water for a few seconds.
3. Transfer the pasta to a large mixing bowl.
4. Add cucumber, black beans, tomatoes, olives, feta cheese, and red onion to the bowl.
5. Whisk all vinaigrette ingredients together and drizzle on top.
6. Toss until all ingredients are evenly coated with the dressing.
7. Serve immediately, garnished with additional feta and black pepper.

Dinner

Greek Chicken Kebabs

Serving: 6 skewers

Price per serving: \$2.15

**Indicates prices from Walmart from October 2019

Ingredients

- 1 pound boneless skinless chicken breasts
- ⅓ cup plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 4 lemons juiced and zest of one lemon
- 4–5 cloves garlic
- 2 tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. ground black pepper
- 1 red onion sliced
- 1 small zucchini sliced
- 1 red bell pepper sliced

Instructions

1. Slice the chicken breasts into cubes.
2. Combine Greek yogurt and olive oil in a bowl.
3. Zest and juice one of the lemons. Add to the bowl.
4. Add the minced garlic, oregano, salt, and pepper.
5. Pour half of the marinade into a bag with the chicken.
6. Save the rest for later.
7. Marinate the chicken for 30 minutes or up to 3 hours in the refrigerator.
8. Slightly oil the grill and set to medium high.
9. Thread the chicken on the skewers, alternate with onion, zucchini, and red bell pepper (ending with chicken).
10. Grill the chicken, basting the kebabs with the saved marinade and turning often (10–15 min).

Homemade Hummus Recipe

Recipe designed by Alex Colon and Jenny Duong—UF undergraduate students in the Food Science and Human Nutrition Department

Ingredients

- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas
- 1 lemon (juice)
- ¼ cup tahini
- 1 tbsp. garlic (chopped)
- 3 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2–3 tbsp. water (as needed)
- Smoked paprika (for dusting)

Instructions

1. You will need a food processor or blender for this recipe.
2. Drain the chickpeas.
3. Blend together the lemon juice and tahini for 1 minute, scraping down the sides of your blender after 30 seconds. The mixture should become thicker.
4. Add 2 tbsp. olive oil, garlic, cumin, and salt. Blend together for 1 minute, scraping down the sides of your blender after 30 seconds.
5. Add half of the chickpeas and blend for 1 minute again, scraping after 30 seconds. Add the remaining chickpeas and blend for an additional 1 minute, scraping after 30 seconds.
6. Adjust the thickness of your hummus as desired by adding water and blending. The more water you add, the thinner the hummus will be. Be careful not to add too much water.
7. Transfer the hummus to a serving bowl and dust with paprika. Drizzle the remaining 1 tbsp. olive oil over the top. Serve and enjoy!

Find more information and recipes at these websites:

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics <https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/recipes>

MyPlate Recipe Guides <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/myplatekitchen/recipes>

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Table 1. A guide to the American-Mediterranean dietary pattern.

Main Food Group	Sub-Food Group and Weekly Amounts	Daily Amounts	Focus on
Grains		6–8 ounces 1 ounce = 1 slice of bread; ½ cup cooked pasta/rice; ½ cup cooked cereal	-Whole grains: whole-wheat breads, whole-wheat/buckwheat pasta, rolled old-fashioned oats, brown rice, amaranth, bulgur, quinoa, farrow, and barley
Fruits		1.5–2 cups 1 cup equivalent = 1 cup raw or cooked fruit, ½ cup dried fruit	-Focus on fresh or frozen that are in season. -Eat a variety of colors. -Limit your juice intake.
Vegetables	-Dark green (1.5 cups) -Red and orange (5.5 cups) -Legumes (1.5 cups) -Starchy vegetables (5 cups)	2.5–3 cups 1 cup equivalent = 1 cup raw or cooked vegetable, 2 cups leafy salad greens	-Eat a variety of vegetables every day that are fresh or frozen and are in season. -The more colors, the better!
Dairy		3 cups 1 cup equivalent = 1 cup milk, yogurt, or fortified soymilk; 1½ ounces natural cheese such as cheddar cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese	-Consume 2% or reduced-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
Protein	-Seafood (15 ounces) -Meats, poultry, eggs (23 ounces) -Nuts, seeds, soy products (4 ounces)	5–6.5 ounces 1 ounce equivalent = 1 ounce lean meat, poultry, or seafood; 1 egg; ¼ cup cooked beans or tofu; 1 tbsp. peanut butter; ½ ounce nuts or seeds	-Focus on eating lean meats, beans, lentils, and soy. -Bake, grill, or poach when cooking meats.

Note. Information based on an adult who follows an 1800-calorie Mediterranean-style eating pattern according to the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (<https://health.gov/our-work/food-nutrition/2015-2020-dietary-guidelines/guidelines/appendix-4/>).

* If following the traditional Mediterranean diet, prepare/cook foods with 1 tablespoon of olive oil at each main meal. Incorporate heart-healthy fats such as nuts, seeds, and olives daily. Serving sizes vary for olives, nuts, and seeds, so refer to the serving sizes on the food labels.