

Following the Mediterranean Diet

Studies have shown that most people who follow the Mediterranean Diet can reduce their risk for many diseases such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease. The entire family can benefit from following the Mediterranean lifestyle, which includes the healthy foods listed below, 30 minutes of daily physical activity and taking time to relax and enjoy meals and activities with family and friends.

The Mediterranean lifestyle is not an "all-or-nothing" deal. You do not need to follow the diet and lifestyle completely every day of the week to improve your health. Find some easy changes to make for your family and try to stick with them most of the time, then decide on a few more and slowly work them into your family's lifestyle.

Foods in the Mediterranean diet include the following:

- **Whole grains.** Whole grains provide more fiber, B vitamins, magnesium, iron and selenium than processed grains.
- **Fruits and Vegetables** a wide variety, often eaten seasonally and locally grown. These are low-calorie, nutrient dense, high fiber foods that have lots of antioxidants and protective phytochemicals.
- **Legumes (dried beans and peanuts), nuts and seeds.** These are good sources of plant based protein and health fats.
- **Olive oil.** This is the main source of fat in the Mediterranean diet. Olive oil is high in monounsaturated fat which may protect you from heart disease and stroke. It is also high in compounds that can reduce inflammation. It can replace butter, shortening and hydrogenated oils in most recipes.
- **Seafood, poultry and eggs** are eaten more often than other meats.
- **Low fat dairy, mostly as yogurt and cheese** provides high quality protein, calcium and if fortified, Vitamin D for strong bones.
- **Fresh herbs and spices** are added for flavor and can replace the need for added salt.
- **Red wine**, for adults only. Red wine contains alcohol and a compound called resveratrol that may help prevent damage to blood vessels and reduce LDL cholesterol and prevent blood clots. Red wine can be consumed moderately (one 5 oz. glass) and with meals.

Many of the foods in the Mediterranean diet are widely accepted by children. If they object to whole grain products, try white whole wheat products or make food with half whole grains such as half brown rice and half white rice. Some children object to fish that is too fishy. Try experimenting with the milder fish such as tilapia, cod or orange roughy. Serve fish as a taco by adding taco seasonings.

A favorite Mediterranean healthy snack is Hummus served with raw vegetables or chips. Here is a recipe that you can try at home.

Homemade Hummus

1 (15 ounce) can garbanzo beans, drained

1 tablespoon lemon juice

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 clove garlic, crushed

½ teaspoon cumin

½ teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon tahini (sesame seed paste) or peanut butter

Water, as needed up to ¼ cup

Blend all ingredients in a food processor. Stream water if needed into mixture as it blends, making a thick dip.