

Mediterranean Diet

This guide has been prepared for your use by registered dietitians. If you have questions or concerns, please call the nearest Aurora facility to contact a dietitian. Diet counseling is available to discuss your specific needs.

What is the Mediterranean Diet?

The Mediterranean region includes three continents and more than 15 countries. People from Italy, Greece, France, Spain and other Mediterranean countries traditionally eat a diet consisting mainly of grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and olive oil.

Key components of the Mediterranean Diet include:

- Eating foods primarily from plant sources, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds
- A variety of minimally processed and, wherever possible, seasonally fresh and locally grown foods
- Replacing butter and margarine with healthy fats, such as olive oil
- Using herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods
- Eating fish and poultry at least twice weekly
- Daily consumption of low to moderate amounts of cheese and yogurt
- No more than four eggs per week (including those used in cooking and baking)
- Fresh fruit as the typical daily dessert; sweets with a significant amount of sugar and saturated fat consumed no more than a few times a month
- Red meat is only eaten a few times per month in small portions
- Moderate consumption of wine, normally with meals; about one to two glasses per day for men and one glass per day for women, however, individuals should only drink wine if they are medically able to do so, and should ask their doctors for more information.
- Sharing healthy meals as a celebration with family and friends
- Regular physical activity at a level that promotes a healthy weight, fitness and well-being

Why should I follow the Mediterranean Diet?

Researchers have found that a higher intake of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat and lower intake of saturated fat and trans-fatty acids is associated with a decreased risk of heart disease and cancer.

- Saturated fat tends to be hard fat, such as the fat in red meat, butter, cheese, whole milk and ice cream.
- Trans-fatty acids are formed when vegetable oils are hardened or hydrogenated to form margarine or shortening.
- Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature and are found in plant sources. The fat in olive oil is monounsaturated.

What is the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid?

The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid emphasizes making the base foundation of your meals grains (mostly whole), fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, herbs, spices and olive oil. Fish, poultry, eggs, cheese and yogurt are consumed regularly but in low to moderate amounts. Red meat and sweets are listed at the top of the pyramid meaning they should be eaten only a few times a month. The Mediterranean Diet also recommends drinking adequate amounts of water each day and the use of red wine in moderation.

Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

A contemporary approach to delicious, healthy eating

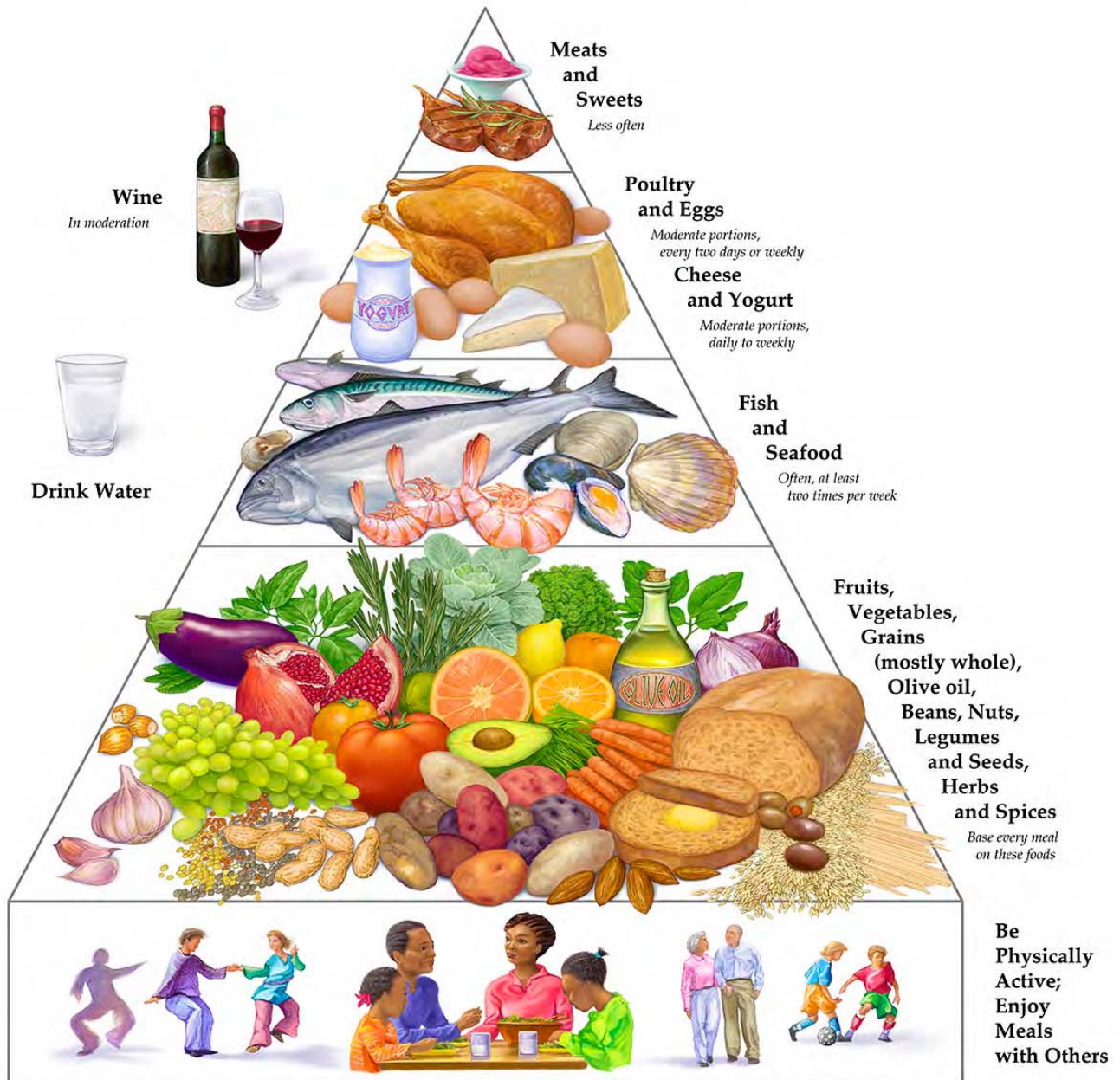


Illustration by George Middleton

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Is the Mediterranean Diet good for everyone?

The pyramid describes a diet for most healthy adults. If overweight or obese, focus should then be on eating more grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes, and less meat, sweets and total fat. Some type of physical activity, such as walking or stair climbing, should be included every day.

Tips for Following the Mediterranean Diet

Bread, potatoes, pasta, rice and other cereals

- Build your diet from a base of grains – rice, pasta, couscous
- Learn to cook couscous, bulgur, barley, polenta and other interesting grains
- Add legumes – chickpeas, lentils, peanuts, beans and peas – to your meals
- Choose whole-grain varieties most often for extra fiber

Fruits and vegetables

- Choose a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and aim for 5 to 9 cups daily
- Top pasta, rice or even pizza with steamed or fresh vegetables
- Add popular Mediterranean ingredients like garlic, fresh herbs, chopped onions, capers and grated lemon or orange zest to dishes
- Try baking garlic until it is soft and golden. It adds a creamy, rich flavor to pasta, rice and bean dishes.
- Make fresh fruit your daily dessert

Fish, poultry, eggs and meat

- Limit fatty meat – it is high in saturated fat
- Choose lower fat alternatives such as poultry, fish or lean red meat
- Eat low to moderate amounts of fish, poultry and eggs a few times a week
- Eat fish, including oily fish such as mackerel, herring, tuna and salmon at least two times a week
- Limit red meat to only a few times per month; slice it in stir-fried dishes so it goes a long way

Milk and dairy products

- Eat low to moderate amounts of cheese and yogurt every day
- Choose lower fat varieties such as low fat yogurt and skim milk
- Use a sprinkling or thin shaving of sharp or imported cheese rather than eating more of less flavorful cheese

Nuts and seeds

- Choose a variety of nuts and seeds – almonds, hazelnuts, pistachios, walnuts and sesame seeds
- Add a small amount of chopped nuts to salads, pasta or other grain dishes for a crunchy texture

Fats

- Substitute olive oil, rich in monounsaturated fat, for butter and other animal fats, which are high in saturated fats
- Use olive oil for salad dressings, marinades, sautéing and stir-frying meats, fish and vegetables
- Limit foods that are fried to only a few times a month
- Drizzle small amounts of olive oil on bread, rice and pastas

Sweets

- Eat only small amounts of foods that contain large amounts of sugar and saturated fat, such as cakes and pastries; limit these foods to only a few times a month

Wine

- Drink red wine in moderation – one to two 5-ounce glasses per day for men, one 5-ounce glass for women
- Avoid wine if it would put you or others at risk, including during pregnancy and before driving

Recommended Web sites for Mediterranean recipes

allrecipes.com

www.epicurious.com

(Search for “Mediterranean” on each site)

A registered dietitian can help

Diet counseling with a registered dietitian may include information on:

- Label reading, shopping, food preparation, adjusting recipes
- Dining out

**For a list of Aurora facilities with a dietitian,
please call Aurora Health Care toll free at
888-863-5502**