

**Women'sHealth**

# **MEDITERRANEAN DIET GUIDE**

**+ FOOD LIST**



# WHAT IS THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET?

You don't have to be a health guru to know about the Mediterranean diet. Year after year, U.S. News & World Report—along with a panel of experts—identifies the Mediterranean diet as the healthiest eating style out there because of its versatility (it's not really a diet at all) and multitude of health benefits.

You see, the Mediterranean diet doesn't involve counting calories, tracking macronutrients like carbohydrates, or any of the strict rules or restrictions of many of the fads marketed to us these days as health or weight-loss quick fixes, explains dietitian Lauren Armstrong, RDN. Instead, it's more of a portrait of the traditional eating patterns of cultures along the Mediterranean Sea (think Greece, Italy, and Spain).

## ▼ THE REASON FOR THE HYPE AROUND HOW THIS PART OF THE WORLD EATS

Research has linked Mediterranean eating styles with everything from reduced rates of cancer and better heart health to improved mental health. (It's no wonder that the Blue Zones Project, which studies the world's longest-lived cultures, highlights communities in both Italy and Greece as some of the healthiest on the planet.)

Though exactly what people throughout these coastal cultures put on their plates varies, there are a few common threads that experts suggest are responsible for their famously robust health, wellbeing, and longevity.

It's all about **eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seafood, legumes, and healthy fats** while limiting red meat, processed foods, and dairy, according to Armstrong.

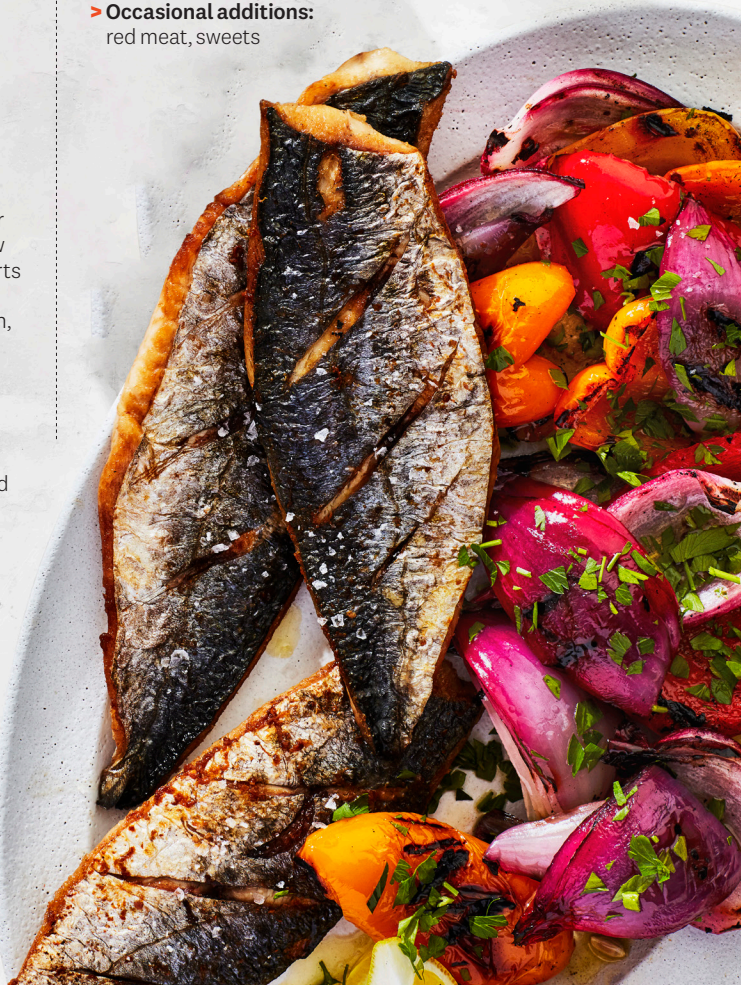
"The beauty is that there isn't a laundry list of things to do or to not eat; **nothing is forbidden or eliminated**," adds dietitian Brynn McDowell, RDN, author of *The Mediterranean Diet Made Easy*. "Instead, it's more about finding balance between the foods to include daily versus occasionally into your diet."

## ▼ SHE LIKES TO BREAK THE DIET INTO:

- > **Daily staples:** fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes, nuts, seeds, and olive oil
- > **Weekly additions:** seafood, poultry, eggs, dairy, red wine
- > **Occasional additions:** red meat, sweets

"There aren't set amounts of each category, but [it] depends on the individual and can vary from day to day," McDowell says. "This makes **the lifestyle more enjoyable and realistic for people** to incorporate into their lives."

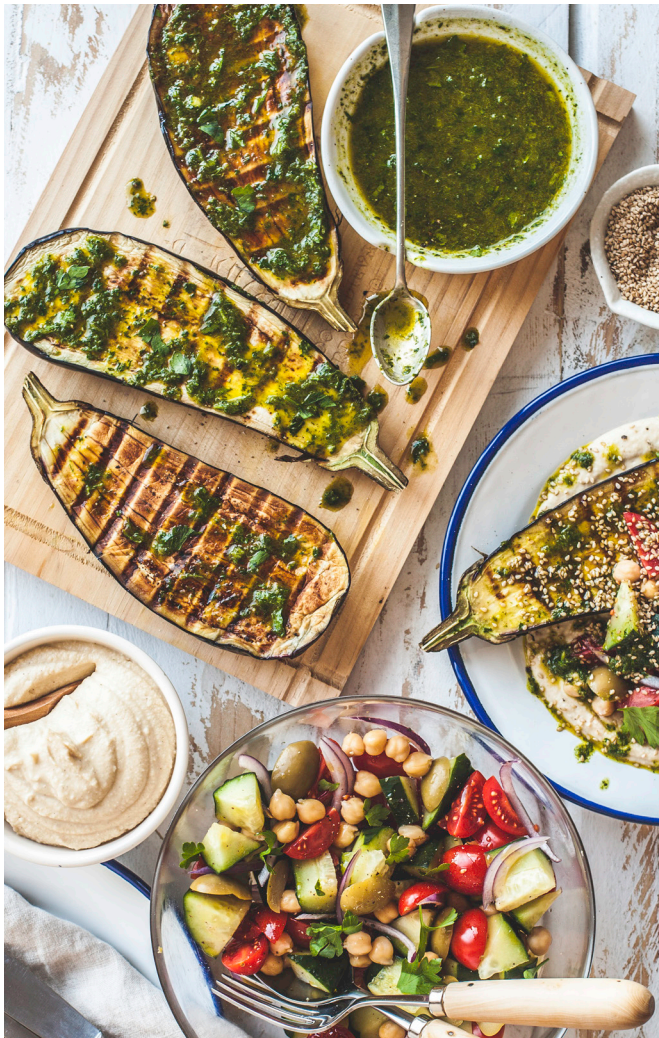
Yep, that means there's room for the occasional glass of **red wine or bowl of ice cream**, too, if whole and plant-based foods take center stage overall.



# 5 TIPS

## FOR MEDITERRANEAN DIET SUCCESS

Moving to the coast of Italy just isn't realistic for most of us (sigh...), but, thankfully, you can adopt the Mediterranean way of eating without any intercontinental travel. These quick expert tips will help you bring the region into your kitchen.



# 1

### ▼ TRY MEATLESS MONDAYS

**Meat-free meals** are common in a Mediterranean style of eating—but that doesn't mean you have to shun animal proteins completely, especially if you're used to building your plate around them. Instead, start experimenting with going meat-free on Mondays, suggests McDowell. This way, you can play around with new **plant-based recipes** without overhauling your entire approach to protein at once.

# 2



### ▼ EMBRACE SEAFOOD

Another simple shift that'll have you feeling more Mediterranean in no time: **getting more of your eats from the sea.** To embrace the regular role seafood plays in the diet, Armstrong recommends planning to **have fish for dinner at least one night per week.** (Most Americans don't eat enough fish to reap the benefits—namely the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids it provides.)

# 3



### ▼ STOCK UP ON SNACKS

When you're crunched for time or need convenient eats, processed foods and drive-thrus become extra tempting. Be prepared for crazy days by keeping some Mediterranean diet-inspired snacks prepped and ready to grab. Armstrong loves **nuts and cut-up vegetables with hummus.** **Whole fruits, such as apples and pears,** are also easy to throw in your bag when you're on the go.

# 4



### ▼ SWITCH UP YOUR COOKING OIL

**Olive oil,** which is high in healthy monounsaturated fats and antioxidants, is a staple of Mediterranean eating. To **bring more of this coastal goodness into your routine,** both Anderson and McDowell recommend swapping common cooking fats like butter for olive oil.

# 5



### ▼ EMBRACE FROZEN FOODS

If you live in an area without easy access to a wide variety of fresh produce or seafood, or simply can't always budget for it (fresh blueberries, for example, can be expensive—especially when not in season), make the most of the freezer aisle, suggests Armstrong. From **shrimp and fish to berries and leafy greens,** you can find all sorts of Mediterranean staples in frozen form—and often for cheaper than the options at the fish counter or in the produce aisle.

# THE MEAL PLAN Women'sHealth

Since Mediterranean eating is all about flexibility, you can mix and match all sorts of meals to enjoy, which means you'll never be bored or feel restricted. Here's just a taste of what you might nosh on throughout the day:

## BREAKFAST

- ▶ Oatmeal with plant-based milk + berries + nut butter



The wholesome carbs in a **bowl of oatmeal** offer lots of energy for the day ahead, while berries add natural sweetness (and squeeze some produce into the meal) and nut butter provides healthy fats. Armstrong recommends making your oatmeal with a milk alternative to keep it plant-based.

## LUNCH

- ▶ sandwich on whole-grain bread + hummus + spinach + tomato + cucumber + artichoke hearts + onion



Sandwiches are totally Mediterranean diet-friendly—if you opt for that **whole-grain bread**, says Armstrong. Load up this midday meal with creamy, fiber-filled hummus and your favorite vegetables for a dose of nutrition that's oh-so satisfying to bite into.

## DINNER

- ▶ Chicken + quinoa + broccoli + Portobello mushrooms



Armstrong's go-to combo of protein, grain, and veggie can be used at any meal—and feels especially handy on nights when you don't have the energy to whip up anything too time-consuming. Just remember to vary your vegetables to get an array of different vitamins and minerals onto your plate.

- ▶ Greek yogurt + sliced fruit + nuts + drizzle of honey + sprinkle of cinnamon



Protein and healthy fats shine in a **yogurt-based breakfast**, McDowell says. Honey, cinnamon, and your favorite fruit add a little hit of sweetness and flavor.

- ▶ Grain bowl with couscous + vegetables like peppers, onions, eggplant, beans, sunflower seeds



Grain bowls are a great way to fuel your body with wholesome carbohydrates and fiber so that you don't experience that dreaded midday slump, suggests Armstrong. This veggie-packed **couscous** bowl gets additional fiber (plus protein!) from beans and sunflower seeds (which offer healthy fats, too).

- ▶ Lentil soup with celery + carrots + onion + tomatoes + mushrooms



A great opportunity to load up on all sorts of plant-based foods, **bean-based soups** are a go-to for McDowell. Try whipping up a big batch and stashing extra in the fridge or freezer to heat up when you're crunched for time.

- ▶ Scrambled eggs + spinach + mushrooms + tomatoes



**Eggs** are the perfect canvas for a breakfast filled with vegetables. McDowell loves a simple combination of spinach, mushrooms, and tomatoes for adding a variety of colors (which means a variety of nutrients) to the meal.

- ▶ Grilled fish + brown rice + grilled zucchini + bell pepper + red onion



When in doubt, a simple combination of protein (**go for fish**), whole grains, and vegetables makes for a quick and satisfying meal, Armstrong says. Don't forget to incorporate olive oil into any marinades or sauces you include.

- ▶ Zucchini noodles or spaghetti squash + tomato sauce + walnuts + lean ground turkey



Sneak more vegetables into comfort foods that feel quintessentially Mediterranean by swapping pasta for **zucchini noodles** or spaghetti squash. On days that you incorporate poultry, lean ground turkey is a great way to add some protein to this cozy meal.

# INDULGING

## MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE

Since the Mediterranean diet isn't a prescriptive plan, that means it doesn't come with hard-and-fast rules about treating yourself.

"One thing the I personally love about this lifestyle is that there is a strong emphasis on making sure that you enjoy your food—desserts included," says McDowell. Of the Mediterranean-inspired dessert recipes out there (there are plenty), she loves a simple combination of vanilla ice cream topped with grilled peaches, a drizzle of honey, and chopped almonds. Notice how it incorporates those nutritious, wholesome toppings? Just another reminder that Mediterranean eating is all about balance.



### ► HOW TO INDULGE

"Not making desserts taboo or forbidden means that you don't have to feel bad when you do enjoy a sweet treat," McDowell adds. "Just make sure that you remember to truly enjoy it when you do indulge."

As for how often you might whip up something special, Armstrong recommends following your intuition instead of sticking to a specific guideline. **If you're truly craving something like ice cream, go ahead and enjoy it mindfully**, she says. Denying your desires and forcing yourself to munch on plain berries instead just sets you up to overindulge on the sweets you really want later.



### ▼ AND WHAT ABOUT THAT RED WINE, YOU ASK?

It's true that wine is a common part of a Mediterranean diet—and there is evidence to suggest that the antioxidants in it can do your heart good. However, that doesn't mean you've got a free pass to finish off bottle after bottle of your favorite vino in the name of health.

"The intake of alcohol is limited on the Mediterranean diet, and when it is incorporated, it's traditionally only red wine," says Armstrong. "We're not talking sweet, dessert wine, either—but dry options such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, or pinot noir." If you drink alcohol, she recommends sticking with a small serving of red wine with dinner.

# WHAT CAN I DO

## TO SUPPORT MY HEALTH ON A MEDITERRANEAN DIET?

Remember what we said about the Mediterranean diet being so much more than just a diet? “It really goes way beyond what we eat and includes lifestyle factors that focus on creating a well-balanced, happy, and healthy life,” McDowell says. If you’re looking to embrace an overall more Mediterranean-inspired way of living, these cultures have plenty of wisdom to offer.



### MAKE MEALS COMMUNAL

“Shared family meals can help you make healthy choices and avoid excess eating,” says Armstrong. Case in point: “Research has even identified a decreased risk of obesity in those that have dinners with family compared to those that eat alone.” The Blue Zones Project identifies connection with family and community—including that which happens over a shared meal—as a common thread amongst the world’s healthiest societies.

### BE PRESENT

Another notable aspect of how Mediterranean communities approach mealtimes: They **make meals a mindful experience**, according to Armstrong. Not only does that mean avoiding distractions (like, ahem, that ever-updating Instagram feed) come mealtime, but making an effort to really focus on eating the meal, a concept dietitians and other experts refer to as mindful eating. “This can help you notice your hunger and fullness cues as well as the effects certain foods have on your body,” Armstrong explains. Ultimately, giving the experience of eating your undivided attention can improve your relationship with food and help you find a true sense of balance and moderation.



### ENJOY THE RIDE

According to the Blue Zones Project, one hallmark of the Mediterranean communities of Sardinia, Italy and Ikaria, Greece that contributes to their astounding health and longevity is that they **build stress-relieving rituals and activities, such as naps and happy hour-like social gatherings, into everyday life**. “Health and wellness go beyond what we eat, and I think the Mediterranean lifestyle does a great job of showing that,” notes McDowell, who also calls out stress management as one of Mediterranean cultures’ biggest wins. You can incorporate any number of self-care practices into your day in a multitude of ways; what matters most, is that easing stress is a given daily priority.

### MIX UP YOUR MOVEMENT

If you’re not a fan of the gym or struggle to maintain a consistent workout routine, you’ll be thrilled to know that the Mediterranean lifestyle is all about incorporating movement that feels nourishing. “It encourages making physical activity a part of our daily routines, rather than looking at it as a chore,” McDowell says. “That might look like **taking a nightly walk after dinner, meeting friends for a hike, dancing, or swimming**.”



# THE FOOD LIST

To stock your fridge, freezer, and pantry with a variety of Mediterranean diet-friendly foods, keep this shopping list handy the next time you head to the supermarket or place a grocery order online.

## PRODUCE

- GARLIC
- ONIONS
- RED ONIONS
- BROCCOLI
- SPINACH
- SPRING MIX GREENS
- CARROTS
- CELERY
- ZUCCHINI
- SPAGHETTI SQUASH
- EGGPLANT
- BELL PEPPERS
- ARTICHOKE
- SWEET POTATOES
- POTATOES
- TOMATOES
- MUSHROOMS
- AVOCADOS
- CUCUMBERS
- ASPARAGUS
- GRAPES
- APPLES
- PEARS
- PEACHES
- FIGS
- STRAWBERRIES
- BLUEBERRIES
- BLACKBERRIES
- CHERRIES
- APRICOTS
- ORANGES
- GRAPEFRUIT
- LEMONS
- BASIL

## PROTEINS

- LENTILS
- BEANS
- CHICKPEAS
- PEAS
- SALMON
- SARDINES
- ANCHOVIES
- SHRIMP
- PASTURED EGGS
- PASTURED CHICKEN
- PASTURED TURKEY

## DAIRY

- RICOTTA CHEESE
- COTTAGE CHEESE
- MILK
- FETA CHEESE
- GOAT CHEESE
- PLAIN GREEK YOGURT

## HEALTHY CARBS

- FARRO
- OATS
- QUINOA
- BARLEY
- COUSCOUS
- BROWN RICE
- WHOLE-GRAIN PASTA
- WHOLE-GRAIN BREAD
- WHOLE-GRAIN CRACKERS
- CHICKPEA OR LENTIL PASTA

## PANTRY ITEMS

- EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL
- BALSAMIC VINEGAR
- WALNUTS
- ALMONDS
- PISTACHIOS
- HAZELNUTS
- SUNFLOWER SEEDS
- PUMPKIN SEEDS
- TAHINI
- UNSWEETENED NUT BUTTER
- RAISINS
- UNSWEETENED DRIED FRUIT
- OLIVES
- ARTICHOKE HEARTS
- TOMATO SAUCE
- LOW-SODIUM VEGETABLE SOUPS
- SUN-DRIED TOMATOES
- CANNED TUNA
- SEA SALT
- BLACK PEPPER
- OREGANO
- CINNAMON
- ZA'ATAR

## FROZEN FOODS

- FROZEN PEAS
- FROZEN CARROTS
- FROZEN SPINACH
- FROZEN BROCCOLI
- FROZEN MIXED VEGETABLES
- FROZEN BERRIES
- FROZEN MIXED FRUIT
- FROZEN FISH
- FROZEN SHRIMP

## OTHER

- HUMMUS
- LEMON JUICE
- COFFEE
- TEA
- PLANT-BASED MILK ALTERNATIVES

## TREATS

- HONEY
- DARK CHOCOLATE
- ORGANIC ICE CREAM OR GELATO

