

Mediterranean Style of Eating

What is this style of eating?

The Mediterranean diet is a style of eating that includes foods often eaten in the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. Some of these countries are Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and Morocco. This style of eating includes lots of vegetables, fruits, beans, peas, lentils, fish, nuts, and olive oil—all foods that we can get in Alberta.



What are the benefits?

This way of eating can help you lower your risk for heart disease. It may also help some people manage weight, diabetes, or high blood pressure. That's because this style of eating is higher in nutrients like fibre, healthy fats, vitamins, minerals, and other healthy plant substances. And it's lower in nutrients and foods that are less healthy for your heart, like saturated fats, red and processed meats, refined grains, and sugar.

Do you eat in the Mediterranean style?








Answer the questions below to help you decide if you're eating in the Mediterranean style.




Every *Yes* answer means you have a Mediterranean-style eating habit. If you answer *No* to any of these questions, and you're ready to make healthy changes, use the tips on the following pages to increase your *Yes* answers.

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Do you eat 5 or more vegetable servings every day? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. Do you eat 3 or more fruit servings every day? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Do you eat whole grains (whole grain or whole wheat breads, cereal, pasta, or rice) every day? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. Do you use olive oil for cooking and at the table? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. Do you eat nuts, seeds, or avocado at least 3 times a week? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. Do you eat beans, peas, or lentils at least 3 times a week? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. Do you eat fish at least 3 times a week? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 8. Do you enjoy at least one meal a day with friends or family? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

The Mediterranean style of eating for adults

The table below shows you what the Mediterranean style of eating can look like. See pages 3 and 4 for tips.

Food Group	Examples of 1 serving
Vegetables 5 or more servings every day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make 2 of your servings raw or salad. • 1 medium vegetable • ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen, or canned with no added salt or sugar • 1 cup (250 mL) raw, leafy vegetables
Fruit 3 or more servings every day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 medium fruit • ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen, or canned with no added salt or sugar • ¼ cup (60 mL) dried fruit
Whole grains 5–6 servings every day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup (125 mL) cooked grains, rice, pasta • 1 slice bread • ¾ cup (175 mL) hot cereal • 30 g cold cereal, crackers • ½ pita, tortilla, roti
Herbs, spices, garlic, onion Portions not limited	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as flavourings instead of salt.
Milk and Alternatives 1–3 servings every day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup (250 mL) skim or 1% milk • ¾ cup (175 mL) lower fat yogurt or kefir • 1½ oz (50 g) cheese, less than 20% milk fat (M.F.)
Olive oil 4 Tbsp (60 mL) or more every day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose virgin or extra virgin olive oil.
Nuts, seeds, olives, avocado 3 or more servings every week	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ cup (60 mL) unsalted nuts or seeds • 10 small or 7 large olives • ½ avocado • 2 Tbsp (30 mL) nut and seed butters

Food Group	Examples of 1 serving
Beans, peas, lentils 3 or more servings every week	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¾ cup (175 mL) cooked dried beans, peas, or lentils
Fish and seafood 3 or more servings every week	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3½ oz (100 g) cooked from fresh or frozen, or canned • Eat at least 1 serving a week of fish high in omega-3 fats: salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, or trout.
Lean meat (poultry and red meat) Less than 2 servings a day	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2½ oz (75 g) or ½ cup (125 mL) • Choose poultry (chicken and turkey) more often than red meat (beef, pork, lamb, or goat).

Tips to eat in the Mediterranean Style

Eat vegetables and fruit at meals and snacks

- Choose brightly coloured vegetables. Some examples are beets, carrots, eggplant, kale, okra, spinach, squash, and tomatoes.
- Choose brightly coloured fruits. Some examples are oranges, strawberries, melons, and peaches.
- Prepare vegetables with small amounts of olive oil, and no salt or sugar.
- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruit are good choices. Frozen and canned are often as nutritious as fresh.
Look for canned vegetables and fruit with little or no added salt and sugar.
- Eat vegetables and fruit instead of drinking juice, as fruits are higher in fibre and lower in sugar.
- Look for dried fruit with no added sugar.

- At least 2 times a week, eat *sofrito*, a Mediterranean sauce made of tomato, garlic, onion, herbs, olive oil, and other vegetables. You can use the recipe at the end of this handout to make sofrito at home, and use it in cooking or add it to food at the table.

Choose whole grains

- Read the ingredient list. For all grains, look for *whole* or *whole grain* and then the name of the grain (for example: whole grain wheat, or whole grain rye).
- Look for grain products with whole grains listed as the first grain ingredient.
- Choose whole grain breads, cereals, and crackers; whole wheat pasta and couscous; oats, quinoa, barley, bulgur, brown rice, spelt, millet, farro, or kasha (buckwheat).

Enjoy Milk and Alternatives

- Choose lower fat milk, yogurt, or kefir with 0–1% milk fat (M.F.).
- Choose cheese with less than 20% M.F.
- Look for milk, yogurt, and kefir with little or no added sugar.

Olive oil

- Choose virgin or extra virgin olive oil in place of other fats, such as butter, margarine, and other oils.
- Add 4 Tbsp (60 mL) or more every day to food in cooking or at the table.

Use beans, peas, lentils instead of meat 3 or more times a week

- Use kidney beans, chickpeas, and lentils in soups, casseroles, salads, and spaghetti sauce.
- Have hummus with raw vegetables or other foods.
- Ask your dietitian about other plant foods that have protein.

Enjoy fish and seafood instead of meat 3 or more times a week

- Eat at least 1 serving a week of fish high in omega-3 fats: salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, and trout.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or no added salt canned fish or seafood.

Choose lean poultry, meat, and eggs

- Choose poultry like chicken and turkey more often than red meat (beef, pork, lamb, or goat).
- Eggs and egg whites have protein, and can be used in place of red meat at meals.

If you drink alcohol, use wine in moderation

Drink no more than:

- Women: 10 drinks a week; no more than 2 a day
- Men: 15 drinks a week; no more than 3 a day
- One drink is 5 ounces (142 mL) of wine.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about alcohol.

Enjoy meals with friends or family

A large part of the Mediterranean lifestyle is taking time to enjoy meals with friends and family.



Limit these foods:

- high fat milk products like cream or butter
- processed meat like sausage, bacon, ham, salami, deli meats, and pâté; these are higher in saturated fat and salt
- higher fat fresh meats like marbled steak and roast, ribs, pork belly, duck, or chicken wings
- foods with added sugar to 0–2 times a week; these include pop, iced tea, fruit drinks sweetened with sugar, baked goods (cakes, donuts, cookies, pastries), puddings, custard
- high fat snack foods like French fries, potato chips, buttered popcorn, cheese puffs

Daily activity is also important

Activity helps to lower your risk for heart disease and other diseases. It may help improve your blood cholesterol, make you stronger, and give you a better quality of life.

Daily activity can include:

- low to moderate intensity activities such as gardening and walking
- more vigorous intensity activities such as running, biking, and weight lifting

Find ways to add activity to your daily routine, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Sofrito recipe

Sofrito is a sauce used in Mediterranean cooking. Cooking the tomatoes, onion, and garlic slowly with olive oil increases the flavours and helps you to absorb the nutrients in these foods. Using sofrito will help you eat more servings of vegetables, and may help to lower your risk of heart disease and cancer.



Ingredients:

4 medium	Tomatoes, chopped (or 2 cups/500 mL canned tomatoes, no added salt)	4 medium
½ large	Onion, chopped	½ large
2 cloves	Garlic, minced	2 cloves
1 ½ tsp	Italian seasoning, no salt added (or other herbs or spices)	7 mL
2 Tbsp	Extra virgin olive oil	30 mL

Directions:

1. Place all ingredients in saucepan on medium heat until bubbles form. Stir mixture and reduce heat to low.
2. Cover the saucepan and simmer on low heat for at least 30 minutes or for as long as you'd like (the flavours get stronger as it cooks). If the sauce gets too thick, add water to thin it to desired consistency.

Makes 6 servings (60 mL/ ¼ cup/ 100 g)

Per serving: 60 calories; 5 g fat, 0.5 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g fibre, 3 g sugars, 5 mg sodium, 1 g protein, 227 mg potassium

Notes:

This recipe makes a basic sauce. Try using different herbs and spices to vary the flavours. Adding other vegetables such as diced bell peppers, finely chopped leeks, or hot peppers changes the taste and adds different nutrients.

You can use sofrito in stews, soups, pizza toppings, or other sauces. It can be a topping or spread on bread, crackers, cooked vegetables, chicken or seafood, or as a dip for vegetables.