

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.



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 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?

Check Yes or No for each item below.

Each Yes is a Mediterranean style eating habit you already have. If you're ready to make changes, use the tips on the following pages to increase your Yes answers.

1. I eat 5 or more vegetable servings every day.	☐ Yes	☐ No
2. I eat 3 or more fruit servings every day.	☐ Yes	☐ No
3. I eat whole grains (whole grain or whole wheat breads, cereal, pasta, or rice) every day.	☐ Yes	☐ No
4. I use olive oil for cooking and at the table.	☐ Yes	☐ No
5. I eat nuts, seeds, or avocado at least 3 times a week.	☐ Yes	☐ No
6. I eat beans, peas, or lentils at least 3 times a week.	☐ Yes	☐ No
7. I eat fish at least 3 times a week.	☐ Yes	☐ No
8. I enjoy at least one meal a day with friends or family.	☐ Yes	☐ No

The Mediterranean style of eating

Foods

Examples of 1 serving

Tips

Vegetables - 5 or more servings every day; make 2 of your servings raw or salad



- 1 medium vegetable
- ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen, or canned
- 1 cup (250 mL) raw, leafy vegetables

- Choose brightly coloured vegetables.
- Prepare vegetables with olive oil, and no salt or sugar.
- Frozen and canned vegetables are often as nutritious as fresh.
- Look for canned vegetables with little or no added salt.
- At least 2 times a week eat sofrito, a sauce made of tomato, garlic, onion, herbs, olive oil, and other vegetables. Use the recipe at the end of this handout.

Fruits - 3 or more servings every day



- 1 medium fruit
- ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen, or canned
- ¼ cup (60 mL) dried fruit

- Choose brightly coloured fruits.
- Frozen and canned fruits are often as nutritious as fresh.
- Look for canned fruits with little or no added sugar.
- Eat fruit instead of drinking juice, as fruits are higher in fibre and lower in sugar.
- Look for dried fruit with no added sugar.

Whole grains - 5–6 servings every day



- 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

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

Herbs, spices, garlic, onion - Portions not limited



- Use as flavourings instead of salt.

Olive oil - 4 Tbsp (60 mL) or more every day



- Add 4 Tbsp (60 mL) or more every day to food in cooking or at the table.

- Choose virgin or extra virgin olive oil in place of other fats, such as butter, margarine, and other oils.

Foods

Examples of 1 serving

Tips

Milk and dairy foods - 1–3 servings every day



- 1 cup (250 mL) milk
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL) yogurt or kefir
 - 1½ oz (50 g) cheese
- Choose skim, 1%, or 2% milk.
 - Choose yogurt or kefir with less than 4% milk fat (M.F.).
 - Choose reduced-fat cheese
 - Look for milk, yogurt, and kefir with little or no added sugar.

Nuts, seeds, olives, avocado - 3 or more servings every week



- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 mL) unsalted nuts or seeds
 - 10 small or 7 large olives
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ avocado
 - 2 Tbsp (30 mL) nut and seed butters
- Add nuts and seeds to yogurt, salad, or baking.
 - Have avocado on salads, sandwiches, or wraps.
 - Spread peanut butter or almond butter on toast.

Beans, peas, lentils - 3 or more servings every week instead of meat



- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL) cooked dried beans, peas, or lentils
- Use kidney beans, chickpeas, and lentils in soups, casseroles, salads, and spaghetti sauce.
 - Have hummus or bean dip with raw vegetables or other foods.
 - Ask your dietitian about other plant foods that have protein.

Fish and seafood - 3 or more servings every week instead of meat



- 3½ oz (100 g) cooked from fresh or frozen, or canned
- Choose fresh, frozen, or no added salt canned fish or seafood.
 - Eat at least 1 serving a week of fish higher in omega-3 fats like salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, or trout.

Lean meat (poultry and red meat) - Less than 2 servings a day



- 2½ oz (75 g) or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL)
- Choose lean poultry, meat, and eggs.
 - Choose poultry like chicken and turkey more often than red meat (beef, pork, lamb, or goat).
 - Use eggs and egg whites in place of red meat at meals.

Enjoy meals with friends or family

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



Alcohol and the Mediterranean style of eating

You do not need to drink alcohol to follow the Mediterranean style of eating. Drinking less alcohol is better for your health.

If you drink alcohol, have wine in moderation at meals. One drink is 5 ounces (142 mL) of wine.

Talk to your healthcare team if you have questions about alcohol and your health. For more information about alcohol and your health, visit ccsa.ca.

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, and custard
- high fat and salt snack foods like French fries, potato chips, buttered popcorn, or 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, swimming, and lifting weights

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

Next steps

Change can be hard, especially if you try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goals into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting. To learn more, visit ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts and search “setting goals”.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](https://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.

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)

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.