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HEART CENTER

J. BARTON WILLIAMS, MD, P.A.

Mediterranean diet: A heart-healthy eating plan

The heart-healthy Mediterranean is a healthy eating plan based on typical foods and recipes of Mediterranean-style cooking. Here's how to adopt the Mediterranean diet

If you're looking for a heart-healthy eating plan, the Mediterranean diet might be right for you. The Mediterranean diet incorporates the basics of healthy eating — plus a splash of flavorful olive oil and perhaps even a glass of red wine — among other components characterizing the traditional cooking style of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

Most healthy diets include fruits, vegetables, fish and whole grains, and limit unhealthy fats. While these parts of a healthy diet remain tried-and-true, subtle variations or differences in proportions of certain foods may make a difference in your risk of heart disease.

Benefits of the Mediterranean diet

The Traditional Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet, found in countries like Greece and Southern Italy, has been associated with longer life spans, reduced rates of chronic disease (less cardiovascular disease and dementia), and fewer cancers of the colon, breast, prostate, and uterus.

Here are the characteristics of the traditional, healthy Mediterranean diet:

- It maximizes natural whole foods and minimizes highly processed ones
- Small amounts of red meat
- Less than four eggs per week
- Low to moderate amounts of poultry and fish
- Daily fresh fruit
- Seasonal locally grown foods with minimal processing
- Concentrated sugars only a few times per week

- Wine in low to moderate amounts, and usually taken at mealtimes
- Milk products (mainly cheese and yogurt) in low to moderate amounts
- Olive oil as the predominant fat
- Abundance of foods from plants: vegetables, fruits, beans, potatoes, nuts, seeds, breads and other whole grain products
- Naturally low in saturated fat, trans fats, and cholesterol
- Naturally high in fiber, phytonutrients, vitamins (e.g., folate), antioxidants, and minerals (especially when compared with concentrated, refined starches and sugars in a modern Western diet)
- Naturally high in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, particularly as a replacement for saturated fats

Documented health benefits of the Mediterranean diet may be related to a physically active lifestyle and other social and cultural issues among this region. With any change in diet, consider adding some sort of fitness regimen to your daily routine, but consult your physician before doing so.

Dr. James B. Williams, Cardiology