

# The traditional Mediterranean diet of Greece

## Introduction

### Mediterranean diet (Figure 1)

The term “Mediterranean Diet” includes dietary habits and traditions of all the Mediterranean countries. There are many differences between these countries in ethnic background, culture, religion, economy and agricultural productions. The common in all Mediterranean diets includes high consumption of fruits, vegetables, bread and other cereals, potatoes, beans, nuts and seeds, olive oil is an important monounsaturated fat source, dairy products, fish and poultry are consumed in low to moderate amounts, and relatively small amounts of red meat is eaten, eggs are consumed zero to four times a week and wine is consumed in low to moderate amounts. The Mediterranean diet based on dietary habits and traditions of Crete and South Italy since 1960 and attaches schematically the pyramid to mark the required food consumption on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

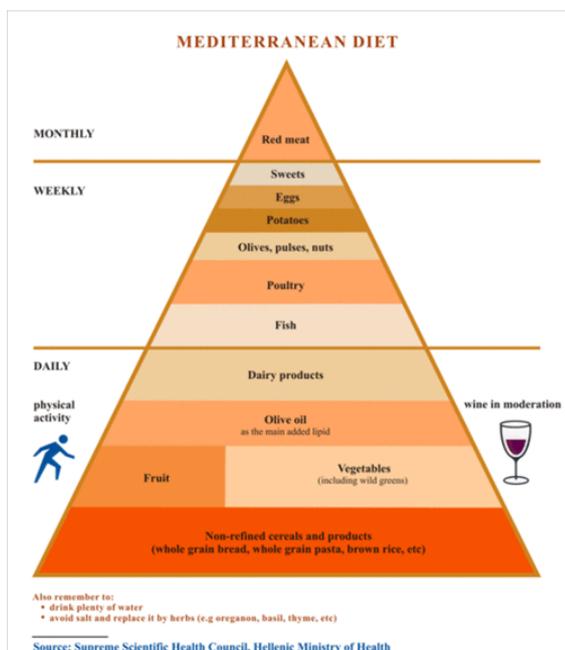


Figure 1 Mediterranean diet.

The food groups at the bottom of the pyramid are those that are consumed on a daily basis, with breads, carbohydrates and whole grains forming its foundation. The daily portion of the pyramid consists of plant-based foods, cheese and yogurt, and olive oil. The weekly part of the pyramid consists of fish, poultry, eggs and sweets. Red meats fall into the monthly group at the very top of the pyramid.

Example for imitation for health and longevity are, according to all surveys, the Cretans. Investigations have shown that the diet model that protects against heart attacks and various forms of cancer

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is the one followed by the rural population of Crete. Simple diet, rich in vegetables, fruits, homemade brown bread, pure cheese, and foods cooked with olive oil. An important factor for the health of the population of Crete was also a physical exercise. Thirteen kilometres walking per day was the natural way to exercise the Cretans.

### The Greek traditional diet

The Greek diet is based on three principles: **Variety – Moderation – Balance.**

- A) **Variety:** Regards on separating food into groups and placing them in the Healthy Eating Pyramid. Thus, by consuming food from all food groups with the frequency stipulated in the pyramid, we can receive all nutrients in the correct amounts.
- B) **Moderation:** There are no forbidden foods, nor foods that should be consumed in excess. All food has something to offer and contributes to covering nutritional needs in normal quantities and at the correct frequency
- C) **Balance:** Regards the intake of food from all so that all nutrients are taken in quantities that not only allow the body to function well, but also maintain body weight at normal levels.

### Dietary guidelines

- a) Eat eight servings of non-refined cereals and products daily.
- b) Eat six servings of vegetables (including wild greens) daily.
- c) Eat three servings of fruit daily.
- d) Use olive oil as the main added lipid.
- e) Eat two servings of dairy products a day.
- f) Practice physical activity on a daily basis (at least 30minutes a day).
- g) Drink wine in moderation.

- h) Eat five or six servings of fish a week.
- i) Eat four servings of poultry a week.
- j) Eat three or four servings of olives, pulses and nuts a week.
- k) Eat three servings of potatoes a week.
- l) Eat three servings of eggs a week.
- m) Eat a maximum of three servings of sweets a week.
- n) Eat four servings of red meat a month.
- o) Drink plenty of water.
- p) Avoid salt and replace it by herbs (e.g. oregano, basil, thyme, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Also, maintain the weight at normal levels (Body Mass Index: 18.5-24.9kg/m<sup>2</sup>).

### The benefits of traditional Mediterranean diet

Plenty of studies show that the pyramid describes a dietary pattern that is attractive for its famous palatability as well as for its health benefits.

The results in the Greek EPIC cohort shows the traditional Mediterranean diet of Greece is associated with reduced total mortality

as well as reduced mortality from coronary heart disease and cancer and may be an optimal diet both for healthy people and for patients with coronary heart disease and other chronic conditions.<sup>2</sup>

The variety of foods that make up Greek traditional cooking has many benefits for human health:

- i. Reducing the risk of heart disease.
- ii. Preventing breast cancer.
- iii. Helping fight against obesity.

### Acknowledgements

None.

### Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

### References

1. Food-based dietary guidelines.
2. Trichopoulou A. Mediterranean diet, traditional foods, and health: evidence from the Greek EPIC cohort. *Food Nutr Bull.* 2007;28(2):236–240.