

Nutrition News

for Seniors


EAT WELL

Provided by the Nutrition Division of the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services

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10 Healthy "Mediterranean" Ways to Show Your Heart Some Love



February is National Heart Month. So why not show your heart a little love by following the Mediterranean Diet, which focuses on fruits, vegetables, olive oil, fish and small amounts of red meat. Thousands of scientific studies - as well as the American Heart Association - say that your heart will benefit if you incorporate these foods into your everyday diet.

Here are 10 Healthy Mediterranean Foods (well, 9 plus an important reminder to exercise!) along with a tip for each to help your heart this month and beyond.

1. Extra Virgin Olive Oil: Rich in monounsaturated fats, olive oil lowers bad (LDL) cholesterol, reducing the risk of developing heart disease.

Tip: Use healthful olive oil instead of butter when sautéing or roasting vegetables.

2. Fish: Salmon is super-rich in omega-3 fatty acids that reduce blood pressure and the risk of heart disease. Nutrition scientists and the American Heart Association suggest eating fish twice a week to benefit from its heart-healthy fats.

Tip: Grill or broil salmon and serve with a green vegetable and a squeeze of lemon juice for added flavor.

3. Nuts: Nuts and peanuts are good sources of protein and fiber and are rich in heart-healthy omega-3s and omega-6s. They also have plenty of mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, good for reducing the risk of cardiovascular heart disease.

Tip: Sprinkle peanuts and nuts on salads, pastas and cereals or add them to muffin batters for an extra crunch.

4. More Herbs and Spices - Less Salt: Herbs and spices contain important plant compounds, known as phytonutrients that are essential to good health. They are a healthy substitute for salt, which can increase blood pressure.

Tip: Add an extra pinch of dried or fresh herbs or spices to soups, dressings and sauces to heighten flavor without adding salt.

5. Whole Grains: Oatmeal is a fiber-rich super food that may help lower cholesterol and help keep arteries clear. It is also packed with omega-3 fatty acids, folate and potassium.

Tip: Start your day with a steaming bowl of healthy oatmeal, or reach for an oatmeal raisin cookie for a heart-healthy snack.

6. Red Wine: Made from grapes containing resveratrol and other powerful, naturally-occurring plant compounds, red wine may help reduce the risk of heart disease. If you choose to drink (and your physician says ok), moderate consumption is important - no more than two glasses per day for men, one for women.

Tip: Enjoy a glass of red wine with your dinner tonight.

7. Vegetables: Vegetables have essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that can help protect the body from chronic diseases. Spinach, with high levels of folate, potassium and B-complex vitamins, is a standout for heart health.

Tip: Use spinach instead of lettuce for a nutrient-packed salad or add it to sandwiches, wraps or omelets.

8. Fruit: Fruit has important antioxidants that reduce the risk of heart disease. Blueberries are also a star fruit for heart health because they lower cholesterol and are a good source of vitamin C, potassium, folate and fiber.

Tip: Sprinkle fresh blueberries on cereal and salads or add frozen blueberries to your morning smoothie.

9. Small Amounts of Meat: Meat can be high in cholesterol and saturated fat. If it is eaten frequently, fatty substances could build up inside artery walls.

Tip: Arrange your dinner plate so that meat is a side feature, not the "main event." Or better yet, eat a vegetarian meal a few nights a week.

10. Friends, Family and Exercise: For overall good health including heart health, make exercise a regular part of your day, just like brushing your teeth or checking your email.

Tip: Meet up with a friend or family member and try to walk for 30 minutes, three days a week.

Adapted from "10 Healthy Med Ways to Show Your Heart Some Love" January 2010, Oldways



Oldways is an internationally-respected non-profit, changing the way people eat through positive and practical programs grounded in science and tradition. The Mediterranean Foods Alliance is an Oldways program created to help people eat better with the Mediterranean Diet. You can learn more at www.oldwayspt.org and www.mediterraneanmark.org.



Know Your Numbers

To help keep your heart healthy, make sure to be informed of your blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides measurements. Below are desirable levels:

Blood Pressure	120/80 or below
Cholesterol, Total	200 mg/dl or below
HDL (HDL is your healthy cholesterol - this is one of the few numbers that's good to have high!)	50 mg/dl or above (for women) 40 mg/dl or above (for men)
LDL	Optimal 100 mg/dl or below
Triglycerides	less than 150 mg/dl

Your doctor may set individual goals for you. Always remember to leave your doctor's visit knowing your blood pressure and lab values.