



818 18th Street, NW • Suite 1000 • Washington, DC 20006
202.728.7199 • fax: 202.728.7238 • www.womenheart.org

The Mediterranean Diet – More Than Just Olive Oil

Jennifer Fleming, MS, RD, Alicia Kroat, RD, LDN, and Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD, RD

Observational and clinical studies have shown that the traditional Mediterranean Diet promotes health and longevity, as well as a lower prevalence of dementia, cancer, and cardiovascular disease, including coronary heart disease.

The health benefits of a Mediterranean Diet (“diet” in the original, Latin sense of the word “diaeta,” a way of living) has again been confirmed in a recent study involving thousands of participants living in Spain that was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*

(http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1200303?query=featured_home#t=article).

The study reported that roughly 30% of heart attacks, strokes and deaths from heart disease can be prevented in those at high cardiac risk by switching to a Mediterranean diet rich in olive oil, nuts, beans, fish, fruits and vegetables. With findings so compelling, you may be wondering how to bring the Mediterranean cuisine into your home. First, keep in mind this study was conducted in Spain. Sofrito, for example, is a Spanish variation of a vegetable mixture with tomatoes, pepper, garlic and onion and is often presented as a condiment. As a traditional Mediterranean dish, this healthful vegetable dish is served at many meals. You can do something comparable with a mixture of vegetables and homemade salsa or homemade tomato based sauces, or even serving sides of low sodium tomato soup that contain a vegetable medley. It’s the vegetables that count, not the exact dish.

Olive oil is another staple of a Mediterranean Diet. Use olive oil for salads and dips where the flavor may be fully appreciated. High temperature cooking with olive oil destroys its antioxidants; canola oil has a higher smoking point, which makes it more versatile for cooking and baking. Canola oil also has a healthy fat profile. Whichever oil you choose, keep in mind that vegetable oil is calorically dense and it is important to be mindful of the amount you consume. The 1/4 cup (4 tablespoons) of olive oil daily that was used in the study conducted in Spain contained 480 calories!

Legumes (beans, dried peas and lentils) and nuts are integral foods in a Mediterranean Diet, and are readily available in your local grocery store. Be sure to purchase unsalted nuts. Participants in this study consumed approximately 1 oz of nuts per day. Salads with nuts or rice and beans make perfect options for lunch. Breakfast may be as simple as oatmeal or fruit salad — or even eggs, which can be eaten in moderation. Healthful snacks include nuts or fruit or more vegetables or beans. Dinner may be a vegetable

dish or two, some legumes and a piece of fish, all cooked in or dressed with olive oil (see our fruit of the month recipe), and maybe a little bit of whole grain bread. For dessert, fruit, or at least a dessert based on fruit or nuts or both can complete a meal.

The bottom line is that a Mediterranean Diet can easily be adapted to a healthy dietary pattern anywhere in the United States. All you need to do is start with your own favorite dishes, and modify them to include more vegetables, legumes, and fish. More information on the Mediterranean Diet may be found at the following website: <http://oldwayspt.org/resources/heritage-pyramids/mediterranean-pyramid/overview>

Vegetable of the Month

Cassava

Cassava, also known as yucca, is often confused with the yucca root. It is a native to South America. Cooking methods include boiling, deep frying, and grounding and drying. Cassava is often used as a replacement for boiled potatoes. Deep fried cassava is similar to fried potatoes. Ground and dried cassava can be used as a condiment, toasted in butter, or eaten as a side dish. Dried, powdered cassava is also known as tapioca. Cassava roots are high in carbohydrates, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin C. Cassava leaves are high in protein.

Vegetable Recipe of the Month

Cuban-Style Yucca

Source: www.allrecipes.com

Servings: 12

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

2 pounds cassava, peeled and sliced lengthwise (may also use yucca)

? cup olive oil

? onion, diced

4 cloves garlic, minced

? tsp lemon juice

Directions: Place the cassava into a pan and fill with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, cover, and cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Drain, and place cassava on a serving plate. Meanwhile, place the olive oil, onion, garlic, and lemon juice into a pan. Cook over medium heat about 5 minutes. Pour the hot olive oil mixture over the cassava, and serve immediately.

Nutritional Analysis: Calories 170, Protein 1g, Fat 4.5g, Saturated Fat 0.5g, Calories from Fat 7%, Cholesterol 0mg, Carbohydrates 30g, Fiber 2g, Sodium 10mg, Vitamin A 0%, Calcium 2%, Vitamin C 30%, Iron 2%