

# Mediterranean diet: *should you try it?*

You may have heard about the Mediterranean diet and how some people believe it can make you healthy. But, what is this diet, and is it right for you?

The Mediterranean diet isn't a special diet plan or product. Instead, it describes the typical diet of people who live near the Mediterranean Sea. In this region, many people eat a diet that focuses on:

- Plenty of vegetables and fruits
- Moderate amounts of dairy, fish and poultry
- Whole-grain bread and cereals
- Beans and lentils
- Nuts and seeds
- Olive oil
- Wine (low to moderate amounts)
- Very little red meat and sugary desserts
- Fresh, mostly unprocessed foods

When followed properly, the Mediterranean diet is similar to the diet recommended by the American Heart Association (AHA). But, the Mediterranean diet tends to be higher in fat than the AHA recommendations. The AHA believes that this higher amount of fat may be leading to obesity in Mediterranean countries.

## ARE MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLE HEALTHIER?

This begs the question: does the Mediterranean diet make you healthier? Mediterranean countries have lower rates of heart disease than the U.S. But, this may not be due to diet alone. Their exercise habits and other factors could also play a role.



## FAT'S NOT ALL BAD

The AHA says that the type of fat in the Mediterranean diet is healthier than the typical American diet. This is because the American diet often includes eating too much saturated fat, particularly from red meat. The Mediterranean diet uses healthier unsaturated fats from olive oil and fish. These unsaturated fats are better for the heart because they don't raise unhealthy blood cholesterol levels.

But, this doesn't mean you should eat high amounts of any kind of fat. The AHA still recommends that even the healthy unsaturated fats should be eaten in moderate amounts. Saturated fat should be limited to six percent of a person's total calories each day. Saturated fat is found in meat and dairy products, as well as coconut oil.

Fat has nine calories per gram, which means it packs more calories than carbs and protein. So, consuming too much of it could still lead to unwanted weight gain – even if it's the healthy kind of fat.

## WHAT'S THE VERDICT ON THIS DIET?



**THE BOTTOM LINE:** No large studies have shown that the Mediterranean diet is a magic fix for better health. But, it's a good idea to eat more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and less red meat. **Always ask a doctor before changing your diet, especially if you have any health conditions.**

