

THE OLIVE AND THE GRAPE

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Inspired by the healthy foods and lifestyle of the Mediterranean!

The **Mediterranean Diet Food Pyramid**, now universally recognized as the "gold standard" eating pattern, was developed by the World Health Organization, Harvard School of Public Health, and the Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust, and offers another healthy diet alternative. This food pyramid reflects the traditional Mediterranean diet and is based on scientific research linking this diet to positive health outcomes. A number of research studies have confirmed that following this diet results in a lower risk of heart disease, a lower risk of cancer, and increased life expectancy.

This dietary plan emphasizes the consumption of plant sources such as vegetables, fruit, and whole grains, with fish, lean meats and olive oil. This diet is thought to be healthy because it provides a diet rich in vitamins, antioxidants, and the so called "healthy fats". Olive Oil is a "healthy fat" that is a good source of antioxidants, and eating fish regularly increases the diet in omega 3 fatty acids which has shown to provide reduced incidence of cancer and heart disease. The omega 3 fatty acids are healthy fats that are beneficial to the diet by lowering cholesterol and triglyceride levels, lowering blood pressure and for other anti-inflammatory properties. The Mediterranean Diet reflects a dietary pattern that is attractive not only for its related health benefits, but also for its palatability.

This pyramid representing a healthy, traditional Mediterranean diet, is based on the dietary traditions of Crete, much of the rest of Greece and southern Italy circa 1960, structured in light of current nutrition research. The selection of these regions and this time period as a basis for the design follows from three considerations: **(A poster reflecting the pyramid and lifestyle is on display at each of our locations.)**

Recognition that the rates of chronic diseases were among the lowest in the world and adult life expectancy was among the highest for these populations at that time, even though medical services were limited;

Availability of data describing the character of food consumption patterns of the areas at that time; and

The convergence of the dietary patterns revealed by these data and our current understanding of optimal nutrition based on epidemiological studies and clinical trials worldwide.

Variations of this diet have traditionally existed in other parts of Italy, parts of Spain and Portugal, southern France, parts of North Africa (especially Morocco and Tunisia), parts of Turkey, other parts of the Balkan region, as well as parts of the Middle East (especially Lebanon and Syria). **The diet is closely tied to traditionally areas of olive oil cultivation in the Mediterranean region.**

Given these carefully-defined parameters of geography and time, the phrase traditional *Mediterranean diet* is used here to represent the healthy traditional diets of these regions at that time.

The design of the pyramid is not based solely on either the weight or the percentage of energy (calories) that foods account for in the diet, but on a blend of these that is meant to give relative proportions and a general sense of frequency of servings-as well as an indication of which foods to favor in a healthy Mediterranean-style diet. The pyramid describes a diet for most healthy adults. Whether changes would need to be made for children, women in the reproductive years, and other special population groups is an issue that needs further consideration.

The key to this longevity is a diet that successfully resisted the last 50 years of "modernizing" foods and drinks in industrialized countries. These modern trends led to more meat (mostly beef) and other animal products, fewer fresh fruits and vegetables, and more processed convenience foods. Ironically, this diet of "prosperity" was responsible for burgeoning rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

For Americans, northern and eastern Europeans and others who want to improve their diets, this model provides a highly palatable, healthful framework for change. Equally positive results can be obtained either by entirely adopting a Mediterranean-style diet, or by alternating meals based on this Mediterranean model with meals inspired by healthful dietary traditions of other cultures in other parts of the world. For those living in the Mediterranean region, his pyramid provides a basis for preserving and revitalizing within a modern lifestyle centuries-old traditions that contribute to excellent health and a sense of pleasure and well-being and are a vital part of our collective cultural heritage

Two major changes in this revised pyramid: The **consumption of olive oil** has been moved down to the first level with fruits, vegetables, nut, legumes and grains. It is recommended that an adult consume two tablespoons per day. **Herbs** have been added to the pyramid, in the first level also. Herbs, and spices, were added for reasons of both health and taste. Also, herbs and spices contribute to the national identities of various Mediterranean cuisines. Note that next to this level, it states that each meal every day need to be based from this level.