“I’ll have wine with that”: The Mediterranean diet



*(Picture taken from my Greece trip. Just an option! We could also use the Mediterranean diet pyramid from the Harvard School of Public Health. Or a colorful picture of mixed fruits and vegetables)*

Following the Mediterranean diet is possibly the world’s healthiest way to eat and may take you one step closer to becoming a Greek god or goddess! Okay, maybe not the Greek god part but studies have linked a Mediterranean diet to a lower risk of cancer and Alzheimer’s disease, better cardiovascular health, and a longer life. But what makes the Mediterranean diet so beneficial to your health? This diet consists of foods that are low in saturated fat, rich in healthy oils and filled with fresh fruits and vegetables. Other vital elements of this lifestyle are daily exercise, sharing meals with others and nurturing a deep appreciation for the indulgences of eating healthy and tasty foods.

Let’s figure out how to follow the Mediterranean diet:

**Load up on fruit and vegetables.** Fresh, colorful, non-starchy produce is the base of this diet and will give your body the mix of vitamins and minerals it needs. Aim to eat 4 to 8 serving of vegetables and 2 to 4 servings of fruit a day with a half cup cooked or 1 cup raw equal to one serving. Try tomatoes, romaine lettuce and use citrus fruits to spice up foods in a salad dressing.

**Choose healthy fats.** Olives and their oil is the foundation of this diet and provide healthy monounsaturated fats and polyphenols (fancy nutrient that may prevent certain diseases). Consume four to six servings per day. Examples of one serving of a healthy fat = 1 tbsp of olive oil, 5 olives or 1/8 of an avocado.

**Be grain-smart.** Whole grains are best and contain carbohydrates for energy and fiber to aid in digestion. Have four small daily portions of whole-wheat bread, pasta or pita.

**Focus on fish as your meat.** As the star of this diet, fish is an excellent source of heart and brain friendly fats and is packed with protein. Aim to eat a 3-oz serving of fish (about the size of a deck of cards) at least two times a week. Lean meat and poultry are okay in moderation.

**Eat seeds, nuts, and beans.** These are a great source of fiber and protein; nuts and seeds also provide healthy fats and antioxidants. Eat a small portion of nuts daily consisting of about 10 to 12 almonds or walnut halves. Have a serving of beans (1/2 cup, cooked) at least twice a week from foods like hummus or bean soup.

**Enjoy some dairy.** Choose dairy from cultured milk like yogurt or ricotta, which supplies beneficial bacteria that contribute to digestive health. Enjoy one to three servings daily with a serving being 1 cup of yogurt or 1 oz. of cheese.

**Add herbs and spices.** They’re full of plant compounds with antioxidant and inflammation-fighting effects. Some herbs and spices to try are basil, oregano, parsley and cinnamon.

**Create a social environment.** Enjoy a relaxing meal (adding a small glass of red wine with dinner) with family and friends. Having a positive approach toward eating may help improve digestion and lower stress.

**Partake in physical activity.** Start with 30-60 minutes of moderate exercise 5 times a week. This includes activities like walking, swimming or biking. Be active with family and friends, too.

Live a longer life and lower your risk of health problems by eating foods associated with a Mediterranean diet. Consider ways to incorporate aspects of the Mediterranean diet into your day today!