CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Traditional Mediterranean meals feature foods grown all around the Mediterranean Sea, and enjoyed along with lifestyle factors typical of this region. A common definition of the geographical area covered follows the distribution of the [olive tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olive_tree) found in figure 1.

 

Figure 1… Figure 2…

The region spans a wide variety of cultures with distinct cuisines, in particular (going anticlockwise around the region) the [Maghrebi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maghrebi_cuisine), [Egyptian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_cuisine), [Levantine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levantine_cuisine), [Ottoman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_cuisine) ([Turkish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_cuisine)), [Greek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_cuisine), [Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_cuisine), [Provençal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provencal_cuisine), and [Spanish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_cuisine), though some authors include additional cuisines. [Portuguese cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_cuisine), in particular, is partly Mediterranean in character as seen in figure 2.

The historical connections of the region, as well as the impact of the Mediterranean Sea on [the region's climate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_climate) and economy, mean that these cuisines share dishes beyond the core trio of oil, bread, and wine, such as roast lamb or [mutton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutton), meat stews with vegetables and tomato (for example, Spanish [andrajos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrajos)), vegetable stews (Provençal [ratatouille](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratatouille), Spanish [pisto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pisto), Italian [ciambotta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ciambotta)), and the salted cured fish roe, [bottarga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bottarga), found across the region.

Not all that we’ve come to know and love as Mediterranean cuisine is native to this region. For example, tomatoes are native to central and south America and were introduced to the Mediterranean region prior to the 15th or 16th century.

Grains, Vegetables & Fruits

Grains, vegetables, and fruits are eaten at most meals, because they are important sources of vitamins, minerals, energy, antioxidants, and ﬁber. An eating pattern high in these foods promotes good health and weight control when consumed wisely.  
  
**Grains.** The majority of grains should be whole grains, such as wheat, oats, rice, rye, barley, and corn. These grains are best consumed in whole, minimally-processed forms, because reﬁning and processing can remove many valuable nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and ﬁber.

Grains and grain products common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: barley, buckwheat, [bulgur](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/series12-great-ways-usebulgur), farro, millet, oats, polenta, rice, wheatberries, breads, couscous, and pastas.   
  
**Vegetables.** Vegetables are an important staple of eating patterns of peoples in all the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, providing valuable nutrients and satiety. These beneﬁts are ampliﬁed because the vegetables are normally cooked or drizzled with olive oil. Raw vegetables are also a healthy vegetable option.

Vegetables common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: artichokes, arugula, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, celery, celeriac, chicory, collard greens, cucumbers, dandelion greens, eggplant, fennel, kale, leeks, lemons, lettuce, mache, mushrooms, mustard greens, nettles, okra, onions (red, sweet, white), peas, peppers, potatoes, pumpkin, purslane, radishes, rutabaga, scallions, shallots, spinach, sweet potatoes, turnips, [zucchini](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/welcome-our-12-great-ways-series).  
  
**Fruits.** Whole fresh fruit is ever-present in the Mediterranean. No-sugar-added fruit juices provide only some of the same nutrition beneﬁts as whole fruit, and attention to portion control and total calories is wise. Fruit “drinks” do not have the beneﬁts of fruit juice.

Fruits common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: apples, apricots, avocados, cherries, clementines, dates, ﬁgs, grapefruits, grapes, melons, nectarines, olives, oranges, peaches, pears, pomegranates, strawberries, tangerines, [tomatoes](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/series-12-great-ways-usetomatoes).

Olives & Olive Oil

Olives and olive oil are central to the Mediterranean diet. Olives are universally eaten whole, and widely used for cooking and ﬂavoring in the countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. Olive oil is the principal source of dietary fat used for cooking, baking, and for dressing salads and vegetables. Extra virgin olive oil is highest in health-promoting fats, phytonutrients and other important micronutrients.

### NUTS, BEANS, LEGUMES & SEEDS

Nuts, beans, legumes and seeds are good sources of healthy fats, protein, and ﬁber. They add ﬂavor and texture to Mediterranean dishes.

Nuts, seeds, and legumes common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: almonds, cannellini beans, chickpeas, cashews, [fava beans](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/first-foray-favas), green beans, hazelnuts, kidney beans, lentils, pine nuts, pistachios, sesame seeds, split peas, tahini sauce, walnuts.

### HERBS & SPICES

Herbs and spices add ﬂavors and aromas to foods, reducing the need to add salt or fat when cooking. They are also rich in a broad range of health-promoting antioxidants, and are used liberally in Mediterranean cuisines. Herbs and spices also contribute to the national identities of the various Mediterranean cuisines.

Herbs and spices common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: anise, basil, bay leaf, chiles, cloves, cumin, fennel, garlic, lavender, marjoram, mint, oregano, parsley, pepper, pul biber, rosemary, sage, savory, sumac, tarragon, thyme, [za’atar](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/feel-chicken-tonight-zaatar-chicken-salad).

### CHEESE & YOGURT

Cheese and yogurt are eaten regularly in the traditional Mediterranean diet, but in low to moderate amounts. The calcium in cheese and yogurt is important for bone and heart health. Low fat and nonfat dairy products ease concerns of adverse consequences of somewhat higher consumption of dairy products.

[Dairy](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/have-you-had-your-dairy-today) products common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: brie, chevre, corvo, feta, haloumi, manchego, Parmigiano-Reggiano, pecorino, ricotta, yogurt (including Greek yogurt).

### FISH & SHELLFISH

Fish and shellﬁsh are important sources of healthy protein for Mediterranean populations. Fish such as tuna, herring, sardines, salmon and bream are rich in essential heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, and shellﬁsh and crustaceans including mussels, clams and shrimp have similar beneﬁts. Fish and shellﬁsh are not typically battered and fried in Mediterranean countries.

Seafood common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet includes: abalone, clams, cockles, crab, eel, ﬂounder, lobster mackerel, mussels, octopus, oysters, salmon, [sardines](https://oldwayspt.org/community/blog/series-12-great-ways-usesardines), sea bass, shrimp, squid, tilapia, tuna, whelk, yellowtail.

### EGGS

Eggs are a good source of high-quality protein, and can be especially beneﬁcial for individuals who do not eat meat. Eggs are regularly used in baking in Mediterranean countries.

Chicken, duck, and quail eggs are all common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet.

### MEATS

Meats are eaten in small portions by Mediterranean peoples, who prefer lean cuts. Poultry is a good source of lean protein without the high levels of saturated fat found in some cuts of red meat. With ground meats, 90 percent lean/10 percent fat is a sound choice.

Poultry and red meat common to the traditional Mediterranean Diet include: beef, chicken, duck, goat, guinea fowl, lamb, mutton, pork.

REFERENCES

<https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet/traditional-med-diet>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_cuisine>

Substitutions

1. Chickpeas –
   1. Fava beans
   2. Lentils (green, yellow, red, etc.)
   3. Black beans
   4. Cannellini Beans
   5. Green peas
   6. Soy Beans
2. Herbs (Parsley, Cilantro, Dill) –
   1. Parsley
      1. Chervil
      2. Tarragon
      3. Oregano
      4. Chives
      5. Arugula
      6. Endive
      7. Cilantro
      8. Basil
      9. Celery leaves
      10. Carrot Greens
   2. Cilantro & Coriander
      1. Cumin
      2. Garam Masala
      3. Curry Powder
      4. Caraway
      5. Parsley
      6. Basil
      7. Herb mixtures (dill, parsley, tarragon and oregano)
      8. Cardamom
   3. Dill
      1. Fennel
      2. Thyme
      3. Rosemary
      4. Tarragon
      5. Caraway Seeds
3. Onion and Garlic –
   1. Chives
   2. Scallions/Green onions
   3. Celery and/or carrots
   4. Onion powder
   5. Garlic powder
   6. Ginger
4. Cayenne powder –
   1. Chili powder
   2. Gochugaru
   3. Hot sauce
   4. Hot paprika
   5. Red chili flakes
   6. Jalapeno powder
   7. Chipotle powder
   8. Black pepper
   9. Spice mixture
5. White Sesame seeds –
   1. Black sesame seeds
   2. Poppy seeds
   3. Hemp seeds
   4. Flax seeds
   5. Sunflower seeds
   6. Chia seeds
   7. Chopped nuts
   8. Pumpkin seeds
6. Tahini sauce –
   1. Nut butters
      1. Cashew, almond, brazil, etc.
   2. Sun Butter
   3. Smooth peanut butter
   4. Whole sesame seeds
   5. Sesame oil
   6. Greek yogurt