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Mediterranean Eating for Beginners

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Spain, Greece, Italy ... What do they all have in common? They are countries that border the Mediterranean Sea and eat traditional foods that are both nutritious and delicious.

By now most of us can extoll the virtues of eating a Mediterranean style diet. High in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory substances, it lowers the risk of disorders like arthritis, diabetes, dementia, heart disease, and cancer. Additionally, some of the oldest and healthiest people in the world live in the Mediterranean countries. The basic premise when following this nutritional trailblazer is to eat an abundance of plant-based, minimally processed foods. More often than not, choose fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and nuts. Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is the principal source of fat, and dairy (cheese and yogurt) is eaten in moderation. Red meat is consumed infrequently, with seafood and chicken eaten a few times per week. Dessert typically consists of fresh fruit.

Plate Up Mediterranean Style

How can you implement these fundamentals into your daily meals? Begin with small changes and over time incorporate more. Here are some simple ways to get started.

Buy EVOO. A high-quality product not only tastes better but it's better for you because it's rich in disease fighters. Use it as an ingredient in salad dressing, mix with seasonings and dip bread into it instead of topping with butter, and drizzle this liquid gold on your vegetables.

Pick produce for every meal. Americans are lax on this one. Strive for at least one serving of fruit at breakfast and one cup or more of vegetables at lunch and dinner. Step out of your comfort zone and select new types of produce. Be sure to eat dark leafy greens, such as spinach, arugula, kale, or Swiss chard, often.

Go great grains. Whole grains are filling, contain fiber, and supply vitamins and minerals. Select whole grain bread, switch from white rice to brown or long-grain, make oatmeal from steel cut oats, and give other grains like quinoa, barley and farro a shot.

Cast a line. Many people enjoy fish when they dine out, yet don't cook it at home. Find a few simple, lip-smacking, seafood recipes and surprise your family. Substitute fish for red meat a few times a week.

Go nuts. Walnuts, pistachios, almonds – nuts contain protein, fiber and antioxidants. Since they also contain a lot of calories, limit yourself to a small handful daily. They make a great addition to a meal or a snack.

Spice it up. Mediterranean cooks prepare their meals using a variety of herbs and spices. These gems carry even more antioxidants than produce. Add cinnamon or nutmeg to your oatmeal, cocoa powder to your smoothie and tarragon or dill to your fish.

Wet your whistle. Water is still the beverage of choice; however, coffee and tea are fine too. Just be mindful of the amount of sugar and cream added. And last, but not least ... the coveted red wine. High in disease fighters, one glass of wine a day is considered moderation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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