

Mediterranean Diet Guide

Good nutrition combined with physical activity are vital for cognitive health. The Mediterranean diet is the most researched and promising area in this respect; it's full of wholegrains, healthy fats, fruit and veg, low-fat dairy, fish and a little meat. To make your diet more Mediterranean, start by considering the following:

HYDRATION

Drinking plenty of fluids helps flush our system of waste products and toxins, and aids blood flow to the brain. Tea is great but try upping your intake of plain water.

Aim for 8-10 glasses of plain water per day, and more if you exercise or the weather is particularly hot!

ALCOHOL

A regular glass of red wine is what makes the Mediterranean diet so famous! Red wine can be beneficial for cardiovascular health, but in modest quantities. Other alcoholic beverages such as beer and bitters should be avoided, due to the nitrites they contain.

Have a maximum of 6 glasses of red wine per week.

OLIVE OIL

I know this one has been covered at the hospital, but; yes, use olive oil! Drizzle on salads and use to replace butter in cooking (in mash potatoes, scrambled eggs etc) and as a spread (on bread/sandwiches). However, be mindful of portion size as it's still a fat and therefore will be high in calories.

Use olive oil in place of other fats and oils. Aim for a tbsp (maximum) per serving. Try to use varieties that are labelled as 'extra virgin' or 'virgin' olive oil, as these are better quality and contain the most nutrients.

OILY FISH

Increase the amount of oily fish in your diet. Oily fish contains essential omega-3 fatty acids, which are proven to be important for brain health. You can also get more omega-3s from walnuts!

Have at least 2 portions of oily fish (mackerel, salmon, trout, sardines) each week. Add walnuts to your porridge and Weetabix instead of granola (which often contains high amounts of sugar; see below).

PROCESSED FOODS

Limit the amount of processed meats (bacon, sausages, gammon) in your diet. These are high in nitrosamines which can be detrimental for cognitive health. They are also high in salt (see below).

Switch processed meats to white meat (chicken, turkey) and fish. NB: red meat is also fine (lamb, beef etc) but try to limit this two a couple of times per week.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Fruit and vegetables are central to the Mediterranean diet; about half of all your main meals should be fruits and veg! This is because fruit and vegetables provide important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants to help keep your brain healthy. Green leafy vegetables, beetroot and berries are especially great for cognitive health. However, variety is key!

Aim for 8-10 servings of different fruit and vegetables per day! Half of your plate at breakfast, lunch and dinner should be fruits and veg. Try to snack on a variety of fruits and vegetables; a handful of strawberries or an orange would be great occasional substitutes for an apple or banana. For something savory, give vegetable sticks and hummus dip a try.

WHOLEGRAINS

It's important to include a variety of carbohydrate sources in your diet to get a range of nutrients and to provide your brain with quality energy to function optimally. Wholegrain options such as oats, brown rice and pasta, and wholegrain bread are all fantastic.

Try swapping some of the potato you have at dinner for a different type of carbohydrate from time to time! Choose wholegrain options for every meal. Ideally, about a quarter of your plate at breakfast, lunch and dinner should be wholegrains.

DESSERT AND SUGAR

Too much 'free' or added sugar (i.e. any sugar not from fruit or dairy products), can cause issues for brain health. By sticking to low-fat dairy and fresh fruits for desserts and cereal/porridge toppings, you'll be halting any potential damage caused by other types of sugars.

Avoid adding granola to your porridge/Weetabix; instead add walnuts and/or berries (see above). Try switching your custard/crème caramel desserts a few nights a week to low-fat Greek yogurt with a dash of honey and walnuts.

SEASONINGS

Too much salt (for example from processed meat, tinned foods, and salted nuts) can have a negative effect on blood pressure and therefore cognitive function.

Use onions, herbs and spices to add flavor cooking as opposed to salt. Try to limit processed meats (see above) and tinned soup/spaghetti.

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