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2nd Edition

# Mediterranean Diet Cookbook

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Meri Rafetto, RDN

Wendy Jo Peterson, RDN, MS





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2nd Edition

**by Meri Raffetto, RDN, and  
Wendy Jo Peterson, RDN, MS**

**for  
dummies®**  
A Wiley Brand

## **Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies®, 2nd Edition**

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# Introduction

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Imagine the Mediterranean Sea, where the water and the land are big parts of life. Picture people eating fresh foods and relaxing with friends and family. That image is the essence of the traditional Mediterranean diet. In other words, the Mediterranean diet is part of certain lifestyle habits, including diet, physical activity, stress management, and fun, used in various regions of the Mediterranean coast. Research has shown that people who live in these areas have less heart disease and better longevity. Throughout this book, you uncover more about the details of these habits and how they affect your health and well-being. You can dive in and use all these concepts as a way of life or adopt a few of the strategies that work for you.

No matter what inspired you to pick up this second edition of *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies*, we know that changing habits isn't always easy. These particular life strategies can be challenging because they all focus on one main trend — slowing down — that's at odds with many people's busy lifestyles. Our goal in this book is to show you that implementing a Mediterranean diet and lifestyle can be simple and flavorful. You don't have to follow a strict dietary plan or omit any foods; in fact, the Mediterranean diet is more about adding than taking away. This book is here to help you make small changes so you can find more balance in your life.

## About This Book

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If you're curious about using the Mediterranean style of cooking in your life, *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, is the perfect book for you. In the following pages, you can find historical information about the region, the balance of foods the people there eat, the health benefits of this style of eating, and more than 160 recipes full of delicious flavor. You also find some cooking tips and meal-planning tools to help make your transition simple.

You can use this book as a resource, and you don't have to read it from cover to cover. Instead, you can find that perfect recipe you've been looking for or head straight to the chapter on meal planning (that'd be Chapter 4) to get examples of

how to pull meals together easily. You find everything you need to begin making changes toward a Mediterranean style of life.

## Conventions Used in This Book

Like with all cookbooks, we recommend that you read all the way through each recipe before you start making it. That way, you can account for any necessary refrigeration time, marinating time, and so on and for any special tools, such as a stick blender, that the recipe may require.

Here are a few other guidelines to keep in mind about the recipes in this book:

- » All butter is unsalted unless otherwise stated. Margarine isn't a suitable substitute for butter.
- » All eggs are large.
- » All onions are yellow unless otherwise specified.
- » All pepper is freshly ground black pepper unless otherwise specified.
- » All salt is kosher.
- » All dry ingredient measurements are level.
- » All temperatures are Fahrenheit (see the appendix to convert Fahrenheit temperatures to Celsius).
- » All lemon and lime juice is freshly squeezed.
- » All sugar is white granulated sugar unless otherwise noted.
- » All flour is all-purpose white flour unless otherwise noted.
- » All Greek yogurt is full-fat yogurt.
- » When a recipe says to steam a vegetable, the amount of water you need to use in your pot or steamer depends on your steaming method, so we don't include the water in the ingredients list. As a general rule, if you're using a basket in a pot, the water level should be just below the basket.

Although most of the recipes in this book require relatively few ingredients, we include a few classics that have longer ingredient lists; a culinary tour of the Mediterranean just wouldn't be complete without these dishes. Don't be intimidated by the longer lists of ingredients. They may look overwhelming, but the recipes themselves are still pretty simple.

Finally, we include the following basic conventions throughout the rest of the book:

- » For the purposes of this book, a Mediterranean lifestyle and dietary pattern focuses on the traditional habits seen at least 50 years ago in Crete, Greece, and, southern Italy.
- » Text in shaded sidebars or marked with a Technical Stuff icon is nonessential. We encourage you to read the information anyway, but you can skip it without missing anything crucial to the point at hand.
- 🍅 We use this little tomato icon to highlight the vegetarian recipes in this book.

## Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, we made the following few assumptions about you, our dear reader:

- » You're looking for meal-planning tips that will help you succeed with your health and weight-loss goals.
- » You want to incorporate these recipes into your lifestyle.
- » You have an understanding of cooking basics. In other words, you know your way around a kitchen and know how to use a knife without cutting your finger. If you need to brush up on your cooking skills, check out the latest edition of *Cooking Basics For Dummies* by Bryan Miller and Marie Rama (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) before you get rolling.
- » You're used to the standard American way of eating and wonder whether anything called a "diet" can be yummy and satisfying.
- » You aren't afraid to embrace a lifestyle that goes against the grain of what many around you may be doing.
- » You're looking for ways to get more vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants into your diet.
- » You're genuinely willing to make changes and stick to them until they become habits.

# Icons Used in This Book

The icons in this book are like bookmarks, pointing out information that we think is especially important. Here are the icons we use and the kind of information they point out:



REMEMBER

Even if you forget everything else in this book, remember the paragraphs marked with this icon. They help you make good choices and stay on track with your health goals.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

The information marked with this icon is interesting to know, but it goes beyond what's essential for your basic understanding. If you're the type of person who likes to know more about any particular topic, you'll enjoy these tidbits. If not, feel free to skip 'em.



TIP

This helpful icon marks important information that can save you time and energy, so make sure you don't overlook it.



WARNING

Watch out for this icon; it warns you about potential problems and common pitfalls of implementing a Mediterranean diet into your lifestyle.

## Where to Go from Here

Where to go from here depends on your immediate needs. Ready to start cooking and want to make some fabulous seafood tonight? Head over to Chapter 18. Interested in finding out more about the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet? Sit back and read Chapter 2.

For an online Cheat Sheet with helpful information that you can refer to again and again, head to [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/mediterraneandietcookbook](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/mediterraneandietcookbook).

If you're not sure where you want to begin, peruse the table of contents, pick out the topics that mean the most to you, and start there. *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, contains a wide variety of recipes, so we encourage you try as many as you can at your own pace. We hope that you end up with lots of smudge marks on this book because you use it so lovingly and frequently in your kitchen.

# 1

## **Exploring the Mediterranean Lifestyle**

### IN THIS PART . . .

Know the history of the Mediterranean diet and how researchers found that those individuals who live in specific regions of the Mediterranean had an interesting connection between lifestyle habits and improved longevity, as well as a reduced risk of heart disease and cancer.

Discover the seasonal foods and dietary patterns that make up what is now called the Mediterranean diet.

Examine the main components of the Mediterranean diet including key antioxidants, phytochemicals, vitamins, healthy fats, fiber, and functional foods. Recognize how those foods impact health and wellness.

Understand the scientific research behind the Mediterranean diet and its health benefits.

Use the Mediterranean diet as a weight loss tool and discover how to lose weight in a healthy, sustainable way.



- » Exploring the origins of the Mediterranean diet
- » Focusing on Mediterranean lifestyle habits
- » Peeking at the Mediterranean food guide pyramid

## Chapter 1

# Introducing the Mediterranean Diet

When you picture the Mediterranean diet, you may imagine the sea lapping up on a beach near a quaint village whose residents are lounging and eating fresh grapes and olives. That picture is a good start. The Mediterranean diet is a way of life — one where you eat lots of fresh food and slow down. More technically, *the Mediterranean diet* is a modern set of guidelines inspired by traditional diet patterns of southern Italy, the Greek island of Crete, and other parts of Greece. The lifestyle was first researched in the 1960s, and in 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) officially recognized this diet pattern to be part of the cultural heritage of Italy, Greece, Spain, and Morocco. A more rural lifestyle is a common thread among all these regions.

Research shows that following a traditional Mediterranean diet significantly reduces the risk of heart disease and cancer. The key word here is *traditional*. The Mediterranean region is changing, with faster-paced lifestyles and more modern conveniences. These changes bring with them an increased prevalence of heart disease and cancer.



REMEMBER

For the purposes of this book, when you think of a Mediterranean lifestyle and dietary patterns, the focus is on the traditional habits seen at least 50 years ago in the regions we note here. For instance, if you visited northern Italy in a recent trip, you may not have experienced any of the dietary patterns we promote in this

book. So no, that huge portion of butter-laden pasta you had doesn't qualify for this diet.

Although diet is a big component of the health benefits experienced in the Mediterranean, all the lifestyle patterns combined, including physical activity and relaxation, may provide insight into the health benefits found in this region. This chapter serves as your jumping-off point into the Mediterranean diet and breaks down the Mediterranean dietary patterns and lifestyle choices that you can use as strategies for your own healthy lifestyle.

# Identifying the Flavors of the Mediterranean Coast

The Mediterranean Sea is actually part of the Atlantic Ocean; a total of 21 countries have a coastline on the Mediterranean. However, only a few truly epitomize the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle that we discuss in this book. Having a decent understanding of these countries and their cooking styles can help you have a better appreciation for this way of life.

The recipes in this book are inspired by Mediterranean cooking — specifically, the areas of southern Italy, Greece, Morocco, and Spain. Although you may see some of the same ingredients in many recipes, the flavors used in different countries or regions create entirely different dishes. For example, if you've eaten both Italian and Greek meatballs, you know that the two varieties sure don't taste the same. Table 1-1 lists some of the countries in the Mediterranean that are part of this lifestyle and the associated flavors and cooking styles commonly used in those areas.

**TABLE 1-1** Common Mediterranean Flavors by Region

Region	Commonly Used Ingredients	Overall Cuisine Flavor
Southern Italy	Anchovies, balsamic vinegar, basil, bay leaf, capers, garlic, mozzarella cheese, olive oil, oregano, parsley, peppers, pine nuts, mushrooms, prosciutto, rosemary, sage, thyme, tomatoes	Italian food is rich and savory, with strongly flavored ingredients. Look for tomato-based sauces and even an occasional kick of spicy heat.
Greece	Basil, cucumbers, dill, fennel, feta cheese, garlic, honey, lemon, mint, olive oil, oregano, yogurt	Greek cooking runs the gamut from tangy with citrus accents to savory. Ingredients such as feta cheese add a strong, bold flavor, while yogurt helps provide a creamy texture and soft flavor.

Region	Commonly Used Ingredients	Overall Cuisine Flavor
Morocco	Cinnamon, cumin, dried fruits, ginger, lemon, mint, paprika, parsley, pepper, saffron, turmeric	Moroccan cooking uses exotic flavors that encompass both sweet and savory, often in one dish. The food has strong flavors but isn't necessarily spicy.
Spain	Almonds, anchovies, cheeses (from goats, cows, and sheep), garlic, ham, honey, olive oil, onions, oregano, nuts, paprika, rosemary, saffron, thyme	Regardless of what part of Spain you're in, you can always count on garlic and olive oil setting the stage for a flavorful dish. Spanish dishes are often inspired by Arabic and Roman cuisine with emphasis on fresh seafood. You often find combinations of savory and sweet flavors, such as a seafood stew using sweet paprika.

## Discovering Where the Food Comes From

Although you may be used to cruising to the grocery store and buying whatever you need, folks on the Mediterranean coast 50 years ago didn't roll that way. Instead, they depended on what was farmed and fished locally, making culinary specialties by using everything on hand. Those habits may be fading, but they're still the cornerstone of the Mediterranean diet, and you can still embrace them by incorporating fresh foods into your meals even if you don't live near the Mediterranean.

The following sections highlight where people in the Mediterranean get their food and why these strategies are so important.

### Focusing on farming

In addition to creating travel-worthy beaches, a moderate climate of wet winters and hot summers makes many of the areas along the Mediterranean ideal for agriculture. As a result, people living in the Mediterranean area can grow their own food in gardens and small farms, and many do so. A few areas have this type of climate (similar to the climate of southern coastal California), which makes growing specialized foods like olives and fig trees easier, thus providing ingredients for some of the signature recipes from this region.

Many people in the Mediterranean also abundantly use fresh herbs, spices, onions, and garlic to provide big flavor to their cooking. Table 1-2 is a partial list of common foods grown on the Mediterranean coast; it can give you a glimpse of what fresh ingredients the recipes in Parts 3 and 4 use.

TABLE 1-2

Foods Commonly Grown in the Mediterranean

Category	Ingredient
Legumes	Chickpeas
	Lentils
	Peas
Fruits	Olives
	Mandarin oranges
	Figs
	Grapes
	Lemons
	Persimmons
	Pomegranates
Grains	Barley
	Corn
	Rice
	Wheat
Herbs	Rosemary
	Oregano
	Sage
	Parsley
	Basil
	Dill
	Thyme
	Mint
	Fennel
Nuts	Almonds
	Hazelnuts
	Pine nuts
	Walnuts

Category	Ingredient
Vegetables	Asparagus
	Broccoli
	Cabbage
	Green beans
	Garlic
	Onions
	Eggplant
	Tomatoes
	Broccoli rabe
	Artichokes

## Eating seasonally

As a side effect of eating what they grow locally (see the preceding section), folks in the Mediterranean also eat seasonally; after all, you can't eat what you can't grow. Eating in-season food makes an impact for the following reasons:

- » **Seasonal abundance makes you cook more creatively.** If you have a plentiful amount of, say, green beans, you want to utilize them in any way possible. Finding different, tasty ways to prepare green beans as a side dish or as part of an entree requires more of a thought process, and more care goes into the food itself.
- » **You eat an increased variety of produce throughout the year.** On one hand, you may eat a lot of one food while it's in season, but when that season's over, you'll switch to other foods associated with the new time of year. Relying on produce available year-round at the grocery store means you can easily get stuck in a rut of eating the same standbys throughout the year.



REMEMBER

More variety in produce means more variety of health-promoting nutrients that help you prevent disease. Although eating a few different types of fruits and vegetables throughout the year is better than nothing, getting a wide variety is the ultimate goal for good health.

We know that eating seasonally isn't feasible for many people in certain climates. Don't worry! We cover how you can adopt more of these ideas in Chapter 5.

## Fishing the Mediterranean Sea

People in the Mediterranean area rely on the nearby sea as a food source. Fish appear in many common traditional recipes, providing a wealth of healthy omega-3 fatty acids. You can add seafood to a few weekly meals and reap the same benefits. The least expensive seafood in the Mediterranean region includes sardines, anchovies, mackerel, squid, and octopus. Mid-priced fish and shellfish include tuna, trout, clams, and mussels. For a pricey, special-occasion meal, options include lobster and red mullet.

During the 1960s, before the area was overfished, a variety of seafood was available in the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, fish stocks today are significantly low in the Mediterranean due to overfishing, and many important species, such as tuna, are threatened.

## Eating and Living the Mediterranean Way

The Mediterranean diet includes a specific balance of foods that's high in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants and contains the perfect balance of fatty acids. Alas, you can't just eat your way to Mediterranean health. Living a healthy lifestyle means you have to look at all aspects of your life. Along with the food plan is a way of life that includes regular physical activity and time for rest, community, and fun; for the folks on the Mediterranean coast, this combination seems to have created that ever-elusive life balance.

To tie all the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle concepts together, Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust came up with the Mediterranean Food Guide Pyramid based on the dietary traditions of Crete, other parts of Greece, and southern Italy around 1960, when chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer were low. As you can see in Figure 1-1, the focus is on eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and seafood; eating less meat; and choosing healthy fats such as olive oil. Note also the importance of fun activities, time shared with family and friends, and a passion for life. The following sections examine each aspect so that you can find it, too.

### Focusing on healthy fats

Although Mediterranean residents don't consume a lowfat diet, their dietary pattern is considered heart-healthy. How can that be? Not all fats are created equal. People in the Mediterranean consume more of the healthier types of fats (monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids) and less of the omega-6 polyunsaturated fatty acids and saturated fats other cultures tend to