

# MEDITERRANEAN DIET FOR STROKE PATIENTS

## BENEFITS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Research has shown that the traditional Mediterranean diet reduces the risk of heart disease. The diet has been associated with a lower level of oxidized low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol — the “bad” cholesterol that’s more likely to build up deposits in your arteries.

In fact, a meta-analysis of more than 1.5 million healthy adults demonstrated that following a Mediterranean diet was associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular mortality as well as overall mortality.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

- Eating primarily plant-based foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts
- Replacing butter with healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil
- Using herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods
- Limiting red meat to no more than a few times a month
- Eating fish and poultry at least twice a week
- Enjoying meals with family and friends
- Drinking red wine in moderation (optional)
- Getting plenty of exercise

## FRUITS, VEGETABLES, NUTS AND GRAINS

The Mediterranean diet traditionally includes fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best and we use whole grain breads, cereals, pasta and rice.

Nuts are another part of a healthy Mediterranean diet. Nuts are high in fat (approximately 80 percent of their calories come from fat), but most of the fat is not saturated. Because nuts are high in calories, they should not be eaten in large amounts — generally no more than a handful a day. Avoid candied or honey-roasted and heavily salted nuts.

## HEALTHY FATS

The Mediterranean diet features olive oil as the primary source of fat. Olive oil provides monounsaturated fat — a type of fat that can help reduce LDL cholesterol levels when used in place of saturated or trans fats.

Fatty fish — such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon — are rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Fish is eaten on a regular basis in the Mediterranean diet.

## WINE

Alcohol — in moderation — has been associated with a reduced risk of heart disease in some research studies. The Mediterranean diet suggests no more than 5 ounces (148 milliliters) of wine daily for women (or men over age 65), and no more than 10 ounces (296 milliliters) of wine daily for men under age 65.

If you’re unable to limit your alcohol intake to the amounts defined above, if you have a personal or family history of alcohol abuse, or if you have heart or liver disease, refrain from drinking wine or any other alcohol.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Eat your veggies and fruits — and switch to whole grains. An abundance and variety of plant foods should make up the majority of your meals. Strive for seven to 10 servings a day of veggies and fruits. Switch to whole-grain bread and cereal, and begin to eat more whole-grain rice and pasta products.
- Go nuts. Keep almonds, cashews, pistachios and walnuts on hand for a quick snack. Choose natural peanut butter, rather than the kind with hydrogenated fat added. Try tahini (blended sesame seeds) as a dip or spread for bread.
- Pass on the butter. Try olive or canola oil as a healthy replacement for butter or margarine. Use it in cooking. Dip bread in flavored olive oil or lightly spread it on whole-grain bread for a tasty alternative to butter. Or try tahini as a dip or spread.
- Spice it up. Herbs and spices make food tasty and are also rich in health-promoting substances. Season your meals with herbs and spices rather than salt.
- Go fish. Eat fish once or twice a week. Fresh or water-packed tuna, salmon, trout, mackerel and herring are healthy choices. Avoid fried fish.
- Rein in the red meat. Substitute fish and poultry for red meat. When eaten, make sure it’s lean and keep portions small (about the size of a deck of cards). Also avoid sausage, bacon and other high-fat meats.
- Choose low-fat dairy. Limit higher fat dairy products such as whole or 2 percent milk, cheese and ice cream. Switch to skim milk, fat-free yogurt and low-fat cheese.
- Raise a glass to healthy eating. If it’s OK with your doctor, have a glass of wine at dinner. If you don’t drink alcohol, you don’t need to start. Drinking purple grape juice may be an alternative to wine.

## References:

Estruch, R, et al. Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease with a Mediterranean Diet. *New England Journal of Medicine*, April, 2013 368(14): 1279-1290.

Mediterranean Diet: A Heart-Healthy eating plan. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801>

