



Eating healthy – the Mediterranean Way!

A good way of staying healthy during these days of quarantine and isolation caused by COVID-19 is to adhere closely to a Mediterranean diet. The Mediterranean diet consists mainly of plant foods which are naturally high in dietary fibre, mostly vegetables and fruit, whole grains (oats, wholemeal bread, pasta, rice and other wholegrains), legumes (beans, peas, lentils, chickpeas), nuts, seeds, herbs, spices but also fish and smaller amounts of lower fat dairy, poultry and meat.

People who eat a balanced diet are more likely to be healthier with stronger immune systems and lower risk of chronic illnesses and infectious diseases. Eating a variety of fresh and unprocessed foods every day enables you to get the vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, proteins and antioxidants that the body needs. The Dietary Guidelines for Adults are available [here](#).

Here are some important points to consider when trying to eat healthily:

1. **Be strategic about your shopping list:** Plan what foods to buy, focusing on essential foods that you intend using in the coming weeks or month. Assess first what you already have at home and plan your intake. Use first what you already have in your pantry to avoid food waste.
2. **Shopping:** If shopping for one's own groceries, ideally shopping is carried out by the same person to minimise exposure to the Covid-19 virus. However, nowadays most food retailers offer food delivery options. Making use of 'contact-less' options for purchases is recommended as a measure to contain the spread of the virus.
3. **Use fresh produce first** and other products with a shorter shelf-life. Products like vegetables, fruits, and lower-fat dairy products should be chosen first over non-perishable food products. Frozen vegetables and fruits can also be convenient.
4. **'To cook' OR 'not to cook':** Spend more time preparing home-cooked meals and cook in batches to freeze leftovers meals for another meal. HPDP offers examples of healthy recipes that are available on our online [Library](#) or on social media. You may also try to experiment with ingredients you have available. If time to cook is limited, take advantage of the current 'healthy food/meals' delivery systems. Ensure that the food delivery service keeps food at safe temperatures i.e. below 5°C or above 60°C. Explore what is in your area.

5. **Eat fresh and unprocessed food every day, consume [fibre](#) – to stay healthy and keep a healthy weight.** Being at home for weeks, even months, with limited activities and perhaps ‘no company’ can lead to overeating. Eating adequate amounts of foods naturally high in fibre, offers a prolonged feeling of fullness, and help prevent the need to overeat. For snacks, choose raw vegetables and fresh fruit instead of foods which are high in fat, sugar or salt. Here are some guides to food portion sizes:
 - a. [Adults](#)
 - b. [School-age children](#)

6. **Drink enough water every day.**

It is crucial to keep our bodies well hydrated for optimal health. Water is the ideal drink to quench one’s thirst and the healthiest drink. Drink about 8 – 10 glasses of water every day. To enhance its taste, one may add fresh or frozen fruits like sliced lemon or oranges or berries, as well as cucumbers or herbs such as mint, basil or rosemary.

7. **Healthy food is safe food:** Common foodborne diseases can be prevented by following key principles of good food hygiene
 - a. Keeping hands, kitchen and utensils clean
 - b. Separate raw and cooked food, especially raw fish/meat and fresh produce
 - c. Cook food thoroughly
 - d. Use safe water.

8. **Limit [sugar](#) intake:** The World Health Organisation recommends that ideally free sugars should be limited to no more than 6 teaspoons per day. Fresh fruit should be eaten when cravings for sweetness occur, instead of cookies, cakes and chocolates. Frozen fruits and canned fruits in juice rather than syrup are also good options. When other dessert options are chosen, opt for those low in sugar and consume small portions. Read food labels of low-fat options, as these may often contain high amounts of sugar. Avoid sugar sweetened beverages and limit the amount of sugar or honey added to foods.

9. **Limit [fat](#) intake:** Select cooking methods that require less or no fat, such as steaming, grilling or sautéing. If fat is needed, use unsaturated oils in small amounts such as olive oil to cook foods. Other healthy sources of unsaturated fats include fish, nuts and seeds. Limit saturated fats by trimming excess fat from meat, poultry and choosing skinless options. Reduce red and fatty meats, butter and full-fat dairy products, palm oil, coconut oil, shortening and lard. Avoid trans fats by reading food labels, ensuring that hydrogenated oils are not listed in the ingredients list. Trans fats are often found in processed foods, fast food, frozen pizza, cookies, fried food and margarines.

10. **Limit [salt](#) intake:** When fresh food decreases, it may be necessary to rely more on canned, frozen or processed foods. Many of these foods may contain high levels of salt. WHO recommends consuming less than 5g (less than a teaspoon) per day. Read food labels. Choose products with reduced or no added salt. Try rinsing canned foods such as beans and vegetables to remove some of the excess salt. Avoid adding salt when cooking and to meals at the table. Use fresh or dried herbs and spices for added flavour instead of salt.

11. **Avoid or at least limit alcohol consumption:** Alcohol and alcoholic products should **not** be consumed as a preventive or treatment measure against COVID-19. Alcohol alters one's mental state and decision-making processes. Someone under the effect of alcohol increases their risk of accidental falls, injuries or violence. Alcohol is not a good coping mechanism when dealing with stress – even if you may think so. Its consumption is known to also increase the symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear and panic. Alcohol should therefore not be on the shopping list.