

● A PATIENT GUIDE FROM YOUR CARDIOLOGIST

The Mediterranean Diet & Your Heart

A simple, evidence-based way of eating that can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke, built from real food you'll actually enjoy



01 Why this guide matters to you

If you have heart disease or are working to prevent it, the way you eat is one of the most powerful tools you have. Of all the eating patterns ever studied, the **Mediterranean diet** has the strongest evidence for protecting the heart. It isn't a fad or a crash diet. It's a generous, satisfying way of eating built around vegetables, fruit, beans, wholegrains, olive oil, nuts and fish — the traditional foods of countries around the Mediterranean Sea.

“Patients often expect me to hand them a list of foods to give up. The Mediterranean diet is the opposite — it's mostly about what to add. Add the olive oil, the beans, the oily fish, the vegetables, and the rest tends to take care of itself.”

— DR. RAVI ASSOMULL, CONSULTANT CARDIOLOGIST

The numbers you should know

~30%

LOWER RISK OF HEART ATTACK,
STROKE & CARDIOVASCULAR
DEATH

~70%

FEWER RECURRENT CARDIAC
EVENTS AFTER A HEART ATTACK

7,447

HIGH-RISK ADULTS IN THE
LANDMARK PREDIMED TRIAL

Sources: PREDIMED randomised trial (New England Journal of Medicine, 2018); Lyon Diet Heart Study (Circulation, 1999).

What you'll get from this guide

- A simple explanation of what the Mediterranean diet is, and the small number of foods that do most of the heavy lifting for your heart.
- A clear daily plate and serving guide, with an honest idea of how many calories a day most adults need.
- A fully worked example day showing where the calories come from, plus an affordable **7 day starter plan** of meals that will take little time to make.
- Simple swaps, a shopping steer, and answers to the questions patients ask me most.

★ HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Read it once from cover to cover, then keep the plate guide and 7-day plan on your fridge. You don't need to be perfect — steady, mostly Mediterranean eating is what changes your heart over months and years.

02 What is the Mediterranean diet?

It isn't a strict set of rules—it's a **pattern**. Instead of focusing on individual foods or counting every calorie, think about what your meals look like over the course of a week. Most meals should center on vegetables, fruit, legumes, wholegrains, nuts, and olive oil, while fish and poultry appear regularly. Red meat, sweets, and highly processed foods are eaten less often. Nothing is forbidden, and very little is measured. The overall pattern of your eating matters more than any single meal.



The Mediterranean pyramid — eat most from the wide base.

The core foods

- **Vegetables & fruit** at almost every meal — fresh or frozen.
- **Extra-virgin olive oil** as your main cooking and dressing fat.
- **Beans, lentils & chickpeas** several times a week.
- **Wholegrains** — oats, wholewheat, brown rice, bulgur.
- **Nuts & seeds** — a small daily handful.
- **Oily fish** — salmon, mackerel, sardines — twice a week.
- **Plain dairy** — yoghurt and modest amounts of cheese.
- **Herbs, garlic, lemon & spices** in place of salt.
- **Poultry and eggs** in moderation.
- **Water** as the main drink.

WHAT YOU'LL NATURALLY EAT LESS OF

Because the plate fills up with plants, fish and healthy fats, there's simply less room for the foods that can harm arteries — red and processed meat, sugary drinks and snacks, refined white bread, and ultra-processed ready meals. You cut back without feeling deprived.

△ IT'S A PATTERN, NOT A SINGLE "SUPERFOOD"

No one ingredient does the work. The benefit comes from the overall way of eating — the combination of olive oil, plant foods, fish and wholegrains, eaten consistently over time, rather than a typical Western diet.

03 Why it protects your heart

The Mediterranean diet helps your heart in several ways at once. It can improve cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and inflammation—all of which play a role in heart disease. That's why it can have a bigger impact on reducing the risk of heart attacks and strokes than focusing on cholesterol alone.



Healthier arteries, lower risk

The gold lines are your coronary arteries — the vessels that feed the heart muscle. A diet rich in olive oil, plants and oily fish helps keep their lining smooth and flexible and slows the build-up of fatty plaque (in red). Over time, that means fewer of the blockages behind angina, heart attacks and heart failure.

The four main ways this diet helps your heart



1. Better cholesterol

Olive oil, nuts and oily fish replace some of the saturated fat found in butter and red meat, helping to lower harmful LDL while maintaining healthy HDL, the “good” cholesterol.



2. Lower blood pressure

Potassium-rich vegetables, fruit and beans, together with less salt from processed foods, help reduce the pressure inside the arteries.



3. Less inflammation

Polyphenols found in extra-olive oil, colourful plant foods, herbs and spices help calm low-grade inflammation that can damage artery walls and contribute to plaque build-up.



4. Steadier blood sugar

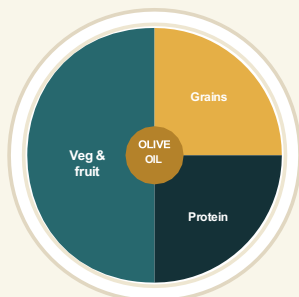
Fibre from beans, wholegrains and vegetables slows the rise in blood sugar after meals, helping to reduce the risk of type-2 diabetes — a major risk factor for heart disease.

♥ THE GOOD NEWS

In the **PREDIMED trial**, adults at high risk who followed a Mediterranean diet enriched with extra-virgin olive oil or nuts had around **30% fewer** heart attacks, strokes and cardiovascular deaths than those given standard low-fat advice — with no calorie counting. In people who had already had a heart attack, the **Lyon Diet Heart Study** found up to **70% fewer** recurrent cardiac events. It is rarely too late to benefit.

04 What a day looks like

You don't have to weigh anything. The simplest guide is your plate: make **half** of it vegetables and fruit, **a quarter** wholegrains, and **a quarter** protein — beans, fish, eggs or poultry — with olive oil as your everyday fat.



Daily & weekly servings

A realistic target for most adults — a “serving” is roughly a handful or a small, cupped portion.

Half plants · ¼ Grains · ¼ Protein

Vegetables	4+ a day	Fill half your plate — fresh or frozen, more colour is better
Fruit	2–3 a day	Whole fruit; berries, apples, citrus, melon, figs
Wholegrains	3–6 a day	Oats, wholewheat bread & pasta, brown rice, bulgur
Extra-virgin olive oil	3–4 tbsp a day	Your main fat — for cooking and for dressing
Beans, lentils & pulses	Most days	Tinned or dried chickpeas, lentils, butter beans
Nuts & seeds	~30 g a day	A small handful — unsalted almonds, walnuts, mixed
Oily fish	2+ a week	Salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout (fresh or tinned)
White fish & poultry	A few a week	In place of red meat most of the time
Plain dairy & eggs	Moderate	Plain yoghurt, modest cheese; up to ~1 egg a day
Red & processed meat	Occasional	Small amounts, now and then — not every day
Sweets & pastries	A treat	Fresh fruit is the everyday dessert; sweets are now-and-then

◆ TO DRINK

Water is your main drink. If you drink alcohol, keep it to **no more than 14 units a week** spread over several days, with alcohol-free days in between — and if you don't drink, there's no heart- health reason to start.

05 A sensible word on calories

The beauty of the Mediterranean diet is that it focuses on **quality**, not strict calorie counting. In the major trials, people improved their heart health *without* counting a single calorie. Still, it helps to know roughly how much food a day is right for you, especially if you're also trying to lose weight.

~2,000

KCAL A DAY — TYPICAL NEED FOR
WOMEN

~2,500

KCAL A DAY — TYPICAL NEED FOR MEN

1,800–2,000

KCAL — THE RANGE USED IN THIS
GUIDE'S MENUS

UK reference intakes (NHS). Individual needs vary with age, size and how active you are — treat these as a starting point, not a rule.

How to use the numbers

- **Maintaining weight?** Use these figures as a guide and focus on food quality rather than calorie counting.
- **Losing weight gradually?** Eating around 500 kcal a day less than your daily needs can lead to a steady loss about half a kilo a week.
- **Portion awareness beats calorie counting.** Aim for a palm-sized portion of protein, a cupped handful of whole grains, two handfuls of vegetables and a thumb-sized portion of olive oil at meals — repeated across the day — lands most people in the right place.

WHY OLIVE OIL “COSTS” ARE WORTH IT

Olive oil is calorie-dense (about 120 kcal a tablespoon) — but used in place of butter or processed spreads, it's one of the few fats that actively protects your heart. Pour it with confidence, just keep your total in take in mind.

★ THE HONEST TRUTH

Most people get better results from *what* they eat than from precisely *how much*. Build the plate well and the calories tend to look after themselves.



Over the page: a full example day showing exactly where the calories come from — followed by a week of meals you can start tomorrow.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

06 One Mediterranean day, costed

A real day's eating of about **1,800 kcal** — naturally rich in olive oil, oily fish, beans, vegetables and nuts. Use it as a template and adjust portions to your own appetite and needs.

Breakfast

≈ 390 kcal

150 g low-fat Greek yoghurt	100
30 g porridge oats	115
15 g walnuts, chopped	100
80 g mixed berries	40
1 tsp honey + black coffee or tea	35

Lunch

≈ 560 kcal

100 g cooked chickpeas	165
Large salad — tomato, cucumber, pepper, red onion, leaves	50
30 g feta	75
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil + lemon dressing	120
5 black olives	25
45 g wholegrain pitta	125

Dinner

≈ 605 kcal

130 g baked salmon, lemon & herbs	270
1 tsp olive oil on the fish	40
150 g cooked bulgur wheat	125
200 g roasted veg (courgette, aubergine, pepper) in 1 tsp oil	120
Side green salad + 1 tsp olive oil & vinegar	50

Snack & dessert

≈ 235 kcal

1 medium orange	60
20 g almonds	120
10 g dark chocolate (70%+)	55

Daily total

≈ 1,790 kcal

Calorie figures are approximate and rounded, for guidance only. The day includes ~3 tbsp olive oil, a portion of oily fish, ~35 g nuts, beans and 7+ servings of vegetables and fruit.

07 Your 7-day Mediterranean plate

A week of simple, affordable meals — most take under 25 minutes. Swap proteins or vegetables for what's in season, on offer, or already in your fridge. Each day lands around **1,800–2,000 kcal**.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER
Monday	Greek yoghurt with oats, walnuts & berries	Lentil & roasted vegetable salad with feta	Baked salmon, bulgur wheat & roasted Mediterranean veg
Tuesday	Wholegrain toast, smashed avocado, tomato & poached egg	Minestrone with cannellini beans & wholegrain bread	Chicken souvlaki with Greek salad & tzatziki
Wednesday	Overnight oats with milk, chia, almonds & pear	Tuna, white bean & rocket salad with olive oil	Vegetable & chickpea tagine with wholewheat couscous
Thursday	Plain yoghurt with figs, honey & pistachios	Hummus, wholegrain pitta, falafel & big salad	Grilled mackerel, roasted tomatoes, new potatoes & greens
Friday	Tomato & herb omelette with rye toast	Greek lentil soup (fakes) with crusty wholegrain bread	Wholewheat pasta with sardines, garlic, lemon & rocket
Saturday	Shakshuka — eggs baked in tomato & pepper — with bread	Mixed bean & roasted pepper salad with feta	Roast chicken with ratatouille & brown rice
Sunday	Greek yoghurt, mixed berries, oats & nut butter	Grilled sardines on toast with tomato salad	Slow-cooked white bean & vegetable stew with bread

For families & tight budgets

Frozen is your friend. Frozen veg, fruit and oily fish are just as nutritious as fresh — often cheaper and less likely to go to waste.

Tins are the backbone. Beans, lentils, tomatoes and sardines are inexpensive, keep for months, and form basis of dozens of meals.

Batch-cook once, eat three times. A pot of lentil soup, tagine or bean stew on Sunday can become lunch and a midweek dinner.

Assembly beats cooking on tired nights. Wholegrain pitta + tinned beans + bagged salad + olive oil is a complete dinner in minutes.

Meat stretches further that it fills. Use smaller amounts of meat and bulk meals out with beans, lentils and vegetables.



08 Simple swaps to get started

You don't need to change everything at once. Start with one or two of these one-for-one swaps — each nudges your cholesterol, blood pressure or weight in the right direction, and they quickly become habit.

SWAP OUT

Butter & spreads

SWAP IN

Extra-virgin olive oil

SWAP OUT

Red & processed meat

SWAP IN

Oily fish or pulses

SWAP OUT

White bread & rice

SWAP IN

Wholegrain & brown

SWAP OUT

Crisps & biscuits

SWAP IN

Nuts, olives & fruit

SWAP OUT

Creamy / sugary dressings

SWAP IN

Olive oil, lemon & herbs

SWAP OUT

Salt at the table

SWAP IN

Garlic, lemon & spices

SWAP OUT

Sugary & fizzy drinks

SWAP IN

Water + lemon

SWAP OUT

Sugary breakfast cereal

SWAP IN

Plain oats + fruit

Shop like a Mediterranean cook

- Build the trolley from the **edges** — produce, fish counter, dairy — before the aisles.
- Keep a stocked cupboard: **olive oil, tinned beans & tomatoes, tinned fish, oats, wholegrains, nuts.**
- Read the back of the packet — a **short list of real ingredients** is a good sign.
- Buy vegetables and fruit frozen as well as fresh, so you never run out.



START WITH JUST ONE

If a week of changes feels like too much, change one thing: use olive oil instead of butter, and add a portion of vegetables to your evening meal. Build from there.

09 What patients ask me most

Q. Isn't olive oil too fatty if I'm watching my weight?

Olive oil is calorie-dense, but the fat is the heart-protective kind. Used *in place of* butter and processed spreads — not on top of them — it improves your cholesterol. Use it generously as your main fat while keeping your overall intake sensible.

Q. Do I really not need to count calories?

Correct — the major trials showed benefit with no calorie counting at all. Focus first on the food groups and portions. The ~1,800–2,000 kcal benchmark in this guide is simply there if you find numbers helpful.

Q. Is a glass of red wine part of the diet?

It's optional, not essential. The food is what protects your heart. If you do drink, stay within 14 units a week with alcohol-free days — and if you don't drink, there's no heart reason to start.

Q. Won't all that fish and olive oil be expensive?

It needn't be. Tinned sardines, mackerel and salmon, dried or tinned pulses, frozen vegetables and seasonal produce make this one of the more affordable ways to eat well.

Q. Can I follow it as a vegetarian?

Absolutely. Beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, eggs, dairy and nuts cover your protein. If you don't eat fish, get omega-3 from walnuts, ground flaxseed and rapeseed oil.

Q. I'm on a statin — does diet still matter?

Yes, enormously. Statins lower cholesterol, but they don't deliver the blood-pressure, weight, blood-sugar and inflammation benefits of eating well. The two work together.

⚠ IMPORTANT IF YOU TAKE A BLOOD THINNER

If you take warfarin, leafy green vegetables are still encouraged — but keep your intake **steady** week to week rather than suddenly increasing it, as the vitamin K affects your dose. Check with your clinician before making big changes.

10 Five things to take away

If you remember nothing else, remember these five. Pin them to the fridge and share them with whoever shops and cooks in your home.

1 It's the best-proven diet for the heart

Around 30% fewer heart attacks and strokes in trials — and up to 70% fewer recurrences after a heart attack. Strong, consistent evidence.

2 Add, don't just subtract

Olive oil, beans, oily fish, nuts, vegetables and fruit. Crowd out the processed food by filling up on the good stuff.

3 Build the plate by halves and quarters

Half vegetables and fruit, a quarter wholegrains, a quarter protein — olive oil as your everyday fat. No scales required.

4 Quality beats counting

Eat real food in sensible portions. Around 1,800–2,000 kcal suits most adults — but how you eat matters more than the exact number.

5 Consistency, not perfection

Mostly-Mediterranean, most days, for months — that's what changes your arteries. It is never too late to start.

△ IMPORTANT — PLEASE READ

This booklet is general health information and is not a substitute for personalised medical advice. Decisions about your medication, diet and treatment should be made together with your GP, cardiologist or a registered dietitian — especially if you take blood-thinners, blood-pressure or diabetes medication, or have kidney disease. If you experience chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations or sudden weakness, seek medical help immediately.



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