

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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No, you don't really need to go to the Mediterranean to eat healthfully! But the evidence just keeps coming in that eating the way people in the Mediterranean area tend to eat will help keep us healthy. Their way of eating seems to reduce our risks of heart disease and strokes, to slow down or prevent the development of diabetes, to keep our blood vessels healthy, and most recently to help protect our brains. That's a lot of help from one basic way of eating.

The problem for most people is that there is no one, strict "Mediterranean DIET". If you look at the diet section in bookstores, there are plenty of books with specific menus, specific lists of what you may and may not eat in week 1, week 2.... week 56! Some diets go by color, others by flavor, others by weight. But there's no particular set of menus and lists for a cure-all Mediterranean diet. So how are we supposed to eat that way?

It's not a diet, it's a pattern. And we would probably all be better off if we stopped thinking about it as a diet. Diets are usually ways of eating for a short time, and when the diet is done, we get to go back to eating 'normally', the way we like to eat. But that's the problem. If we want to get the benefits of healthy eating for life, we need to shift how we eat for life. So eating like a Mediterranean is a pattern, it's a style of eating to stick to for the rest of your longer life.

The pattern is this: Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Eat lots of beans and legumes. Eat whole grains. Eat more fish. Make most of the fat you eat vegetable oils.

At the same time, that will mean eating less red meat, eating less whole fat dairy products, and avoiding solid fats. And if you want alcohol, make it just a glass of red wine with a meal. Notice that none of this says to stop eating all of one food, or to only eat one food. It should be a gradual shift in how we prepare our food and how we fill out plates.

So think about it this way. Next time you feel like reaching for a cookie, grab a piece of fruit instead. When you fill your plate, take two scoops of vegetables and just one of rice or potatoes. Take a stroll through the produce section of your favorite grocery. Find something you haven't eaten for the last several months. Put one in your cart and have it for dinner tonight or tomorrow.

Is there something there that you've never cooked or eaten? If you're not sure how to prepare it, ask for the manager of the produce section. Ask him or her how you should handle it. If you have a computer, do a search for a recipe when you get home. (Or email me at the Extension office!) Find a recipe that has spices and seasonings that you all ready know you like. Next time you're in the store pick out enough for just one meal, so in case you really don't like it you won't have to suffer through it for several meals!

If you're not ready for new fruits and veggies, then look at some other part of the pattern. An easier change for you might be to change the amount and kind of fats you eat. Do a better job of trimming all visible fats from red meat. Grill instead of fry your meats. Look for the leanest pieces of meat. If you use butter, switch to a soft margarine. And use oil for all your cooking instead of solid shortening or fat.

Then start working your way around to less meat and more fish and seafood.

Here's a different way to eat your seafood. You can use cooked shrimp, salmon or your favorite leftover fish. Or use salmon or tuna that comes in the foil pouches. Children might prefer tuna while you serve shrimp to the adults. This recipe makes 2 servings, so multiply it if you need to serve more. Healthy eating!

Seafood and Spinach Pizzas

½ tsp olive oil	¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
1 bag washed spinach	¼ tsp oregano or Italian seasoning
1 ½ cups shredded light mozzarella cheese	2 ripe plum tomatoes, sliced
2 (6 inch) pita breads	10 large cooked shrimp, peeled & deveined

Preheat oven to 400°F. Chop spinach. (Hold a bundle of leaves and slice into ½ inch slices. Repeat with all.) Heat oil in small skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook 1 minute. Add spinach and oregano and cook 1 minute more, until spinach wilts.

Remove pan from heat. Lay pita breads on baking sheet. Sprinkle each with ¼ cup cheese. Divide spinach between the 2 breads. Add layer of tomato slices, the shrimp or other fish, and top with rest of cheese. Bake for 10 minutes until cheese melts.

Serves 2.