



6 Ways to Follow the Mediterranean Diet

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

Read my quotes in Canadian Living about the 6 Ways to Follow the Mediterranean Diet. It is rare that dietitians, chefs and environmentalists agree, but the Mediterranean diet offers excellent nutrition, flavor and earth friendly meal planning. Find out more here:

It's not often that a diet encourages you to indulge in bowls of pasta, deep glasses of wine and rich cheeses – but that's exactly what the Mediterranean diet does! And, surprisingly, it's really good for you.
By Alyssa Ashton

The Mediterranean diet can help prevent cancer, diabetes, stroke and heart disease, says Andrea Holwegner, registered dietitian and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc. in Calgary, Alberta. Here she offers six tips to help you indulge in this delicious and heart-healthy diet.

1. Bring on the diet taboos

Most diets scare you away from carbohydrates, but according to Holwegner, "grains and carbs are villainized in the diet industry." The Mediterranean diet is all about eating grains in combination with healthy fats, such as those found in avocados and olive oil. Holwegner recommends opting for an Italian pasta, like Barilla Plus, which has extra protein, omega-3s and fibre. Or try **making your own dough** for a pizza topped with tomatoes, bocconcini and arugula.

2. It's got to be fresh

Tomatoes, eggplant, kale, strong cheeses, chickpeas, nuts and crusty breads are all must-have ingredients in the Mediterranean diet. "The key to the Mediterranean diet is that it's all fresh ingredients," explains Holwegner. You want to replace all of the processed foods in your diet with plant-based foods. Farmer's markets – and even your own backyard – are great places to find fresh veggies and herbs, and make sure to buy fresh olive oil to sauté or grill your vegetables in.



3. Vegetables are the stars of the show

Meat is often the main part of a meal in North America, but in the Mediterranean it's all about the vegetables. While a Canadian dinner often consists of a big bowl of pasta with a thick meat sauce, a Mediterranean meal usually consists of a fresh salad – perhaps arugula in a lemon vinaigrette – with a small bowl of **pasta that is full of vegetables** – tomatoes, kale, garlic and herbs, for example – topped with a lean meat or seafood sauce.

4. It's in the cooking

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes food's natural flavour, which is brought out through the cooking method. The problem is that many people don't know how to cook vegetables, says Holwegner. You can

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steam, roast or stir-fry veggies with olive oil, but Holwegner loves **grilling veggies** on the barbecue best. Try slicing eggplant into thin circles, brushing them with olive oil and then throwing them onto the grill till they're caramelized.

5. It's about connecting

Mediterranean meals aren't a rushed affair eaten in front of the TV. Rather, they're a feast of both food and conversation. "It's as much about how you're eating as what you're eating," says Holwegner, so sit down at the table, eat at a leisurely pace and take the time to chat with friends and family members while you enjoy your meal.

6. Add some wine

Of course, the best way to enjoy a meal with friends and family is over a **bottle of wine**. "No good Mediterranean meal is complete without some wine, particularly the red wines," explains Holwegner. That means it's time to pop the cork, dig into your pasta and imagine you're in Italy, France, Greece or Spain.

To help your **whole family indulge**, we've got tips on getting your **children to eat a Mediterranean diet**.

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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