

The Mediterranean diet

February 2016

What is it?

A traditional Mediterranean diet includes large amounts of fruit, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, legumes (beans, peas and lentils) and olive oil. It includes moderate amounts of fish and alcohol (wine with meals), and low amounts of dairy products, meat and sweets.

Why is it important?

Modern lifestyles involving office working, daily stress, reliance on the car and unhealthy diets are bad for our health. Between 1993 and 2013, the number of obese women increased from 16% to 25% and the number of obese men increased from 13% to 24%. In 2012, 19% of men and 26% of women were classed as inactive. And between 2009 and 2012 overall purchases of fruit and vegetables decreased.

An unhealthy lifestyle and obesity can put you at risk of other health problems, including raised cholesterol, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and diseases of the heart and blood vessels (cardiovascular disease (CVD)). And these can increase your risk of sexual problems.

In 2014, CVD was the second biggest cause of death in the UK, causing 27% of all deaths, a total of around 155,000. These were mainly from heart disease (45%) and stroke (25%). Heart disease remains the biggest single cause of death in the UK.

Studies have shown that consistently eating a Mediterranean diet can:

- Reduce the risk of death from CVD, cancer and other causes
- Reduce the risk of Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease

- Reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes
- Increase the likelihood of healthy aging



Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

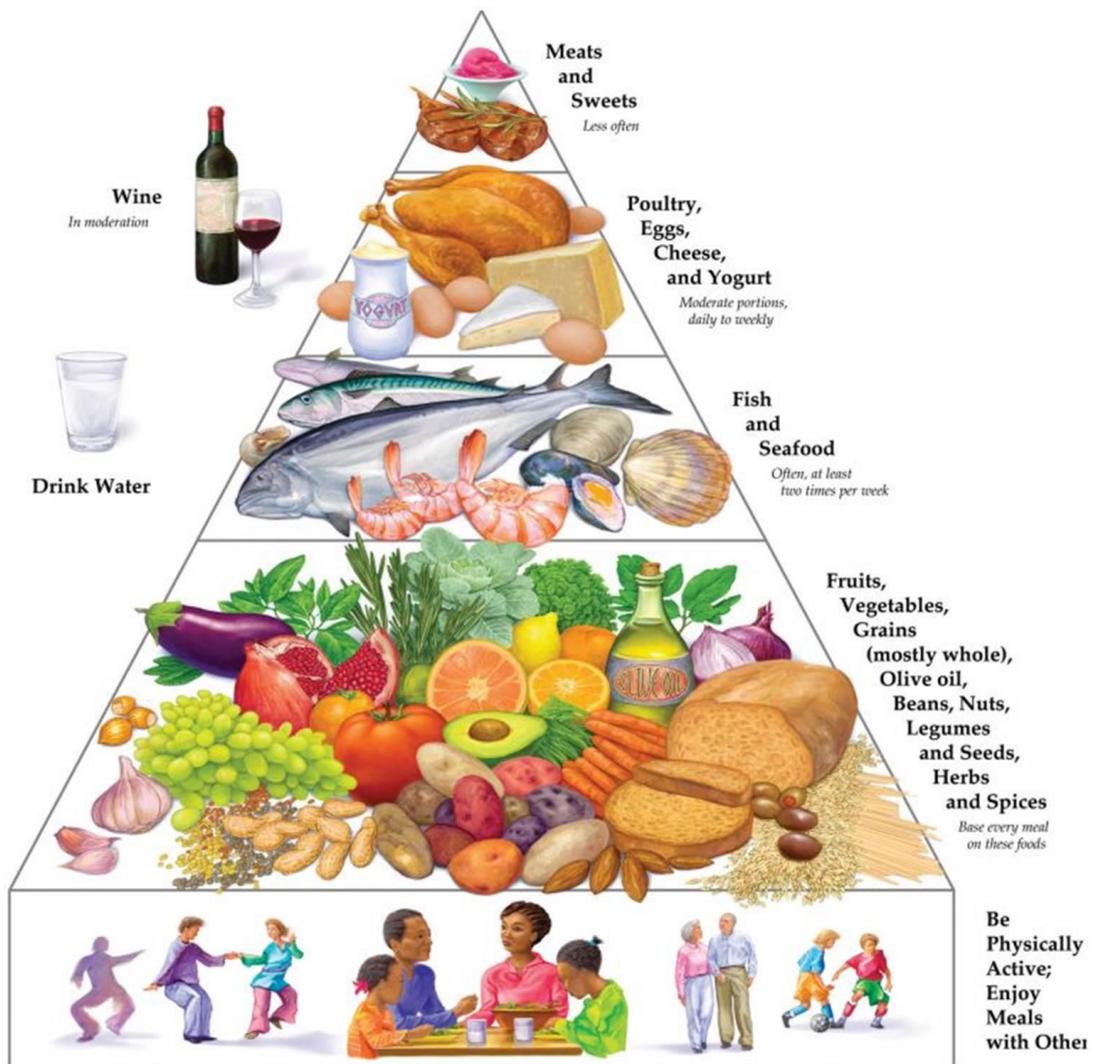


Illustration by George Middleton

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Sexual Advice Association

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What else should you know?

One important part of the Mediterranean diet is the type and amount of fat you should eat. This diet includes foods that contain healthier, unsaturated fats, such as olive oil, nuts and oily fish. These fats can help reduce the risk of CVD by lowering the bad fats (cholesterol and triglycerides) in the body.

You should eat less saturated fat, because this can increase the risk of CVD. Saturated fats are found mainly in animal products (fatty meats, butter, cream and cheese), biscuits, cakes and pastries, but coconut and palm oils also contain them.

Other risk factors for CVD include eating too much salt and sugar, being overweight, not taking enough physical activity and smoking.

Although the Mediterranean diet includes 'moderate' amounts of alcohol, Government guidelines recommend that men and women do not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol per week.

So, consistently eating a Mediterranean diet is a scientifically proven and affordable way to improve your health, but it should also be combined with reduced sugar and salt intake, moderate physical activity, and not smoking.

Where can you get more information?

The Sexual Advice Association is here to help. We cannot give individual medical advice, but we can answer your questions on any sexual problems and put you in touch with local specialist practitioners. We also have a number of factsheets and booklets on sexual problems and related issues for men and women that can be downloaded from our website or requested. Please feel free to email us or phone our Helpline (our contact details are at the bottom of this page).

You can also visit the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk/ for information and advice on many different health and lifestyle topics.

What is the Take Home Message?

Remember, **Large** amounts of plant foods, **moderate** amounts of fish & wine, **small** amounts of animal products and sweets

Further reading

Download or request our booklet '[Sex and the heart](#)' and/or our factsheet '[Body Mass Index \(BMI\)](#)'

Donate

By donating to the Sexual Advice Association, you will know that you are helping improve the lives of people living with sexual problems. If you are interested in donating, please click [here](#) or contact us for more information (details at the bottom of this page).

Thinking About Sex Day: February 14th

Launched by the Sexual Advice Association, Thinking About Sex Day (TASD) is designed to encourage everyone to think about the physical and psychological issues surrounding sexual activity.

