

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR MALTESE ADULTS

HEALTHY EATING

THE MEDITERRANEAN WAY!





THE TRADITIONAL MEDITERRANEAN DIET CONTAINS MANY DISHES WHICH ARE SIMPLE TO PREPARE, ARE TASTY AND GIVE SEVERAL HEALTH BENEFITS. MANY MALTESE DISHES HAVE THESE QUALITIES AND CAN EASILY BE INTEGRATED INTO A PATTERN OF HEALTHY EATING THE MEDITERRANEAN WAY.

Features of the traditional Mediterranean diet and lifestyle include:

- the use of seasonal, fresh and minimally processed foods so that prepared dishes contain significantly higher amounts of protective nutrients and substances that benefit people's health;
- an abundance of vegetables and fruits (mostly fresh and seasonal); herbs and spices, legumes, cereals and nuts;
- regular and moderate use of olive oil;
- moderate to high amounts of fish and seafood;
- a moderate consumption of eggs and dairy products (mostly yoghurt without added sugars or cheese);
- small amounts of meat;
- appropriate food portion sizes;
- home cooking and sitting around the table, preparing and sharing food in the company of family and friends;
- a moderate to vigorous level of physical activity; and
- adequate rest and sleep as part of a balanced lifestyle.

The Healthy Plate

A guide for eating throughout life



Select a variety of nutritious foods from each food group every day.
 Drink plenty of water. Keep active. Reduce sitting time. Enjoy your meals with family and friends.

**Cereals, cereal products
 (preferably wholegrain)
 and potatoes**

Vegetables



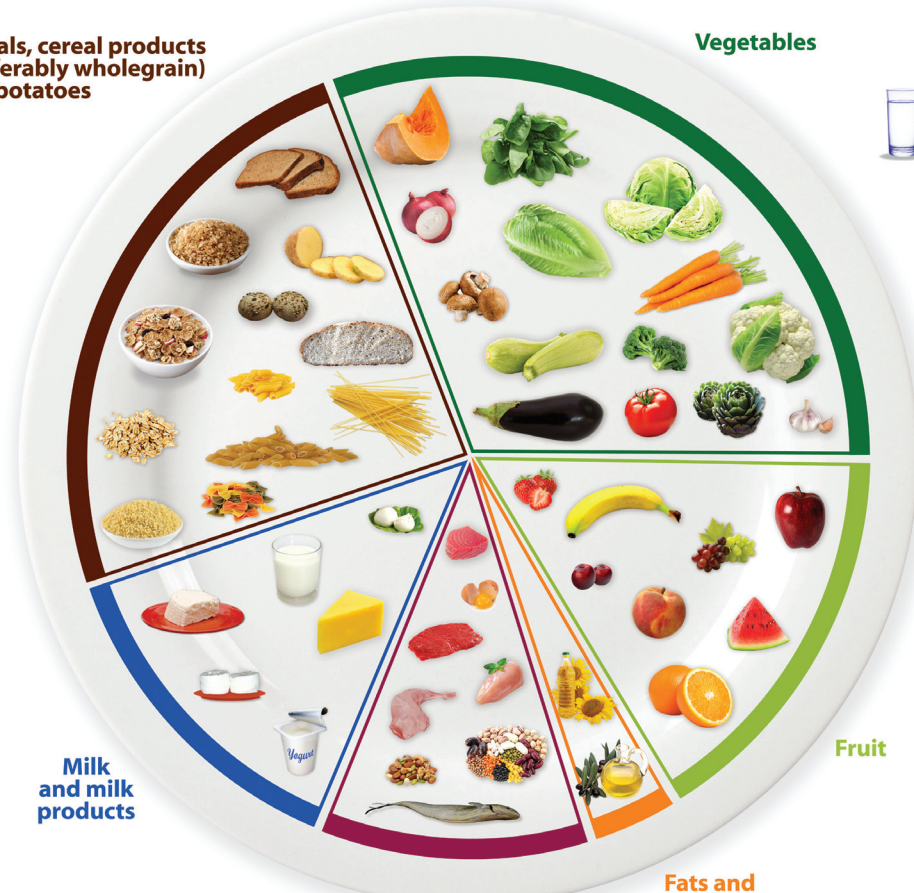
Water

Limit your intake



**Alcohol is not
 allowed in children**

Limit your intake



**Milk
 and milk
 products**

Fruit



**Herbs and
 Spices**

**Lean meat, fish,
 poultry, eggs, legumes,
 nuts and seeds**

**Fats and
 oils**

WHAT IS THE 'HEALTHY PLATE'?

The 'Healthy Plate' is a pictorial food guide intended to help Maltese adults choose a variety of nutritious foods, and understand how best to consume them over a period of time (day/week). The guide suggests a healthy eating pattern based on the Mediterranean Diet¹. The 'plate' contains a variety of nutritious foods from six different food groups and shows the approximate proportions in which adults should consume food of one group relative to another.

Accompanying the Healthy Plate are these guidelines and tips for a healthier lifestyle aimed at healthy active adults. People living with long term conditions may have different dietary needs and should seek additional advice from health professionals.

¹ adapted from the 'Mediterranean diet pyramid: a lifestyle for today' developed by the *Fundacion Dieta Mediterranea (2010 edition)*

HEALTHY EATING GUIDELINES

1. Select a wide variety of nutritious foods every day

To obtain the necessary nutrients from food whilst keeping within your daily energy intake requirements:

- Choose nutritious foods from each of the six food groups.
- Always check food labels when shopping for food. Choose food products that contain the least amount of salt, sugar, saturated and trans fats (found in hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated vegetable oils/fat).
- Use cooking methods such as steaming, baking, boiling or microwaving rather than frying.
- Store cooked food appropriately².

A. HERBS AND SPICES

To give flavour and add palatability to food without adding salt, saturated fats and free sugars³:

- Add herbs and spices.
- Add garlic and onions, vinegar and/or lemon juice.

² See 'A note on food safety' on page 12.

³ Free sugars: sugars added to food and beverages by the manufacturer, cook or consumer and sugars naturally present in natural syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrate.



B. CEREALS AND CEREAL PRODUCTS – PREFERABLY WHOLEGRAIN/WHOLEMEAL

- Include whole grains such as oats, couscous, quinoa, bulgur wheat, barley, millet, pasta and rice with meals and snacks.

PRACTICAL TIP

- **Add oatmeal to your breakfast yoghurt or fruit bowl, or choose wholegrain minimally processed breakfast cereal (low in salt, sugar, saturated and trans fats).**

C. VEGETABLES AND FRUIT

- Eat at least three servings (240g) of vegetables and two servings (160g) of fruit each day.
- Select from a wide variety of vegetables (best if local and in season):
 - Green leafy vegetables e.g. spinach, rucola, kale, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower
 - Orange vegetables e.g. pumpkin, carrots
 - Other vegetables e.g. tomatoes, marrows, aubergines, bell peppers, cucumber.
- Select from a wide variety of fruit (best if local and in season), but do not over consume.

- Choose fresh or frozen vegetables/fruits rather than canned vegetables/fruits. If using canned vegetables or fruit, rinse them well, or choose 'low' or 'no' salt/sugar added varieties where available.
- Choose whole fresh fruits over juice, dried fruit or canned fruit. Dried fruit and fruit juices can damage your teeth. Hence, remember that only one portion is considered as one of the two recommended daily portions of fruit. In addition, they are best consumed during meal times to reduce the damage to your teeth.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- **Store vegetables and fruit properly to retain their nutrients.**
- **Wash vegetables and fruit before preparing or eating them.**
- **Do not overcook vegetables. Light microwaving, steaming and baking are better methods to minimise nutrient losses and keep their taste.**
- **Fresh fruit salads, baked or poached fruit are healthier alternatives to other sugary desserts.**
- **Use colourful vegetables and fruit to garnish and decorate your food.**



D. LEAN MEAT, FISH, POULTRY, EGGS, LEGUMES, UNSALTED NUTS AND SEEDS

- Choose lean cuts of meat.
- Trim excess fat and remove skin from poultry before cooking.
- Eat about two or more servings of fish each week, one of which could be an oily fish. Choose from a wide variety of fresh and seasonal fish.
- Include legume-based dishes throughout the week. These could take the form of home-made dips (*Bigilla*, red kidney dip and hummus). Salads (bean and chickpea salad), stews, vegetable soups (*Minestra*) or home-made *torta tal-ful*.
- Limit intake of red meat to less than twice weekly.
- Processed meats (e.g. deli luncheon meat and ham, smoked cold meat cuts, canned meat and sausages) are to be eaten only occasionally.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Choose cooking methods such as steaming, baking or poaching meat, poultry and fish. Limit adding fat and avoid frying.
- Opt for lean meats and cuts.
- Choose raw or roasted unsalted nuts and seeds instead of fried salted versions.
- Eat fruits high in vitamin C and other antioxidants, such as oranges, kiwi, strawberries, blackberries and cherries with meats, fish, poultry and legumes to help iron absorption by the body.

E. MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

- Choose low fat milk and plain yoghurts instead of full fat. Chopped fresh fruit can be added for taste and for better health value.
- Choose cheeses that are lower in fat (e.g. cottage cheese, *irkotta*, mozzarella, fresh pasteurised *gbejniet*).
- Consume small portions to minimize intake of saturated fat and salt.

F. FATS AND OILS

- Choose mostly vegetable oils, such as olive, canola and sunflower.
- Include foods rich in omega-3 fats such as fish, nuts and flaxseeds or their oils.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Use only small amounts of oil in salads and in cooking.
- Opt for home-made healthier pastries (made from recommended fats/oils) rather than ready-made pastries (which may contain high amounts of saturated and trans fat).
- Limit intake of fried foods, cream-based sauces, ice-creams and creamy pastries, gateaux and desserts.



A person is running on a dirt path in a field of tall grass under a bright, sunny sky. The person is wearing a white tank top, dark shorts, and running shoes. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow and a lens flare effect. The background shows a line of trees and more grass.

2. Drink plenty of water

- Choose plain water as your beverage as often as possible.
- Drink adequate amounts (1.5 to 2.0 litres) of fluids, especially water, each day.
- Avoid soft and sweetened drinks especially in children.
- Increase your water intake in hot weather and with increased activity.
- Sugar-free herbal infusions or low-fat, low-salt broths are good alternatives to water.

3. Keep active

- Be active each day. Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, swimming and cycling, on most days of the week.
- Be active for longer periods of time if you need to reduce weight or maintain a healthy weight for life.
- Reduce the time spent in sedentary activities, such as watching TV, using social media and computer games.
- Consult your medical doctor before starting any type of intense physical activity; especially if you have a history of a health problem.

LIMIT THE CONSUMPTION OF THESE TYPES OF FOOD

Reading food labels is an easy way to know how much sugar, fat, saturated fat, and salt/sodium the product contains. The table below can serve as a guide when comparing food products; to identify whether food products contain high, medium or low amounts of total sugar, total fat, saturated fat, and salt/sodium⁴. Total sugars are made up of free sugars³ and natural sugars (e.g. lactose in milk and fructose in fruit and vegetables).

- Avoid adding salt to your food during cooking or at the table.
- Limit the consumption of ready-made foods containing high amounts of added sugar, salt/sodium; saturated and hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated (trans) fats. Remember, the higher the ingredient is in the ingredients list, the larger its amount in the food product.
- Limit consumption of sweets, sugar and fat-rich desserts, ice-cream, cakes, pastries, spreads and other confectionaries. Eat on an occasional basis and as part of the main meal.
- Avoid adding sugar to your tea or coffee.
- Limit consumption of processed meat

	HIGH (PER 100G)	MEDIUM (PER 100G)	LOW (PER 100G)
Sugars (total) (for breakfast cereals only)	Over 10g	Between 5g-10g	5g and below
Fat (total)	Over 15g	Between 5g-15g	5g and below
Saturated Fats	Over 20g	Between 3g-20g	3g and below
Salt	Over 5g	Between 1.5g-5g	1.5g and below
Sodium	Over 1.5g	Between 0.3-1.5g	0.3g and below
	Over 600mg	Between 100-600mg	100mg and below

4 Salt (g) = sodium (g) x 2.5

BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE FOLLOWING TABLE WHICH GIVES EXAMPLES OF READYMADE FOODS THAT ARE OFTEN HIGH IN SATURATED/TRANS FATS, SUGAR AND SALT AND WHICH SHOULD BE LIMITED

HIGH IN
SATURATED/
TRANS FAT

- Bagged savoury snacks
- Commercial burgers, and nuggets
- Cream and butter
- Fatty flavourings
- Fried date-rolls (*imqaret*)
- Fried food e.g. potato chips
- Meat pies and other pastries
- *Pasti tal-krema*
- *Pastizzi*
- Processed meats and sausages
- *Qassatat*
- *Sfineġ*

HIGH IN
SALT

- Anchovies
- Crisps and other salty savoury snacks
- Maltese sausage
- Processed meats and sausages
- Salty French fries/Fried potato chips
- Salted processed fish
- Salty sundried tomatoes
- Salty pickled vegetables
- Soy sauce
- Stock cubes and salty flavourings

HIGH IN
SUGAR

- Cakes
- Chocolate
- Energy drinks
- Fruit drinks
- *Helwa tat-Tork*
- Ice-cream
- Muffins
- Nougat
- *Pasti u pastini*
- Soft drinks
- Sweet biscuits
- Sweet desserts
- Sweets
- Turkish delight
- Tomato and brown sauces

A. WINE/ALCOHOL

- Moderate your intake of alcohol, if you choose to drink alcohol.
- Avoid alcohol completely if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if advised by your medical doctor.
- Avoid alcohol completely if you are driving or operating machinery.

B. ORAL HEALTH

Good oral health is an essential part of general health as its lack may contribute to heart and lung problems, diabetes and stroke. A diet high in sugar will result in poor oral health.

- Cut down on the amount and frequency of sugary foods and drinks, particularly between meals or within an hour before going to bed.

- Plain water or low fat milk are ideal drinks with and between meals.
- Brush teeth twice a day at least last thing at night and on one other occasion, using fluoridated toothpaste.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- If you have something sweet, have it with your meals to minimise damage to the teeth. This can be followed by a small cube of low or medium fat cheese for better oral health.
- Limit consumption of cereal bars. These are often high in sugar content and sticky in nature which increases the risk of tooth decay.
- Limit the consumption of natural syrups as they are high in sugar and sticky in nature and increase the risk of getting tooth decay.
- Limit consumption of dried fruit. These also have a high sugar concentrate and are sticky in nature increasing the risk for tooth decay.
- Limit consumption, or at least dilute, commercially produced fruit juice which is high in sugar content and is also acidic.

C. ENERGY DRINKS

Energy drinks generally have a high sugar and caffeine content as well as other stimulant substances. They can easily contribute to an excess energy intake and may cause a variety of problems such as headaches, restlessness, insomnia, stomach upset, fast heartbeat, tooth decay and anxiety.

- Avoid energy drinks



A NOTE ON FOOD SAFETY

Food must be prepared and cooked in a safe, healthy and hygienic way so as to avoid foodborne illnesses that at their worst can even be fatal.

- Wash hands repeatedly before, whilst and after cooking and while handling foods.
- Ensure that kitchen surfaces and utensils are thoroughly clean before, during and after use.
- Opt for food that has been treated to ensure safety, such as 'pasteurised' not 'raw' *gbejriet*.
- Avoid cross-contamination with other foods when handling raw poultry and meats.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Eat food very soon after it is cooked. If it is to be eaten at a later time, cool quickly and place it in the refrigerator. Remember, hot items may take long to cool allowing for bacteria to flourish at the centre. To cool quickly, place in a shallow container, or cool the storage dish in a container with ice.
- Reheat stored food thoroughly and eat immediately.

FOOD BASED DIETARY GUIDELINES – THE MEDITERRANEAN WAY

The equivalent of three main meals is usually eaten daily; and some people may include one or two smaller snacks throughout the day. The table below shows the number of servings for each of the six food groups that could be eaten by adults. The total amount of food to be consumed depends on age, gender, height, weight and physical activity levels of a person.



CONSUME DAILY

Cereals	1 serving per meal (3-4 per day)	Include bread, pasta, rice, couscous and other cereals and cereal products in your daily diets. Preferably opt for wholegrain/wholemeal varieties 1 serving = 1 medium slice of bread; 40g of breakfast cereals; 80-100g of raw cereals, pasta and rice preferably wholegrain or wholemeal
Vegetables	3-5 servings per day	Opt for a wide variety of colours and textures; ideally fresh. These will provide a diversity of antioxidants and fibre which protect against heart disease and certain cancers amongst others. 1 serving = 80g
Fruit	2-3 servings per day	Opt for a wide variety of fruits of different colours and textures. Choose these as your regular dessert. Fruit provide a diversity of antioxidants and fibre which protect against heart disease and certain cancers amongst others. 1 serving (≈80g) = 1 medium sized fruit; 2 medium sized plums; 80g fresh fruit salad
Water	1.5 -2.0 litres (6-8 glasses)	Drink plain water; you can also have non-sugary herbal infusions and broths (with low fat and salt content) for adequate hydration 1 serving = 1 '250ml' glass/bowl
Dairy products	2 servings	Choose low-fat plain milk, yoghurt and cheese as part of your daily diet. Low-fat versions are advised as full-fat versions can be a high source of saturated fat. Lower fat versions are still high in protein and calcium. 1 serving = 250mls milk; 1 tub (150mls) yoghurt; 30-40g cheese; 45-50g irkotta/gbejna
Olive oil	1 tablespoon (15mls)/ person	Use as the principal source of dietary fats/oils 1 serving = 1 tbsp/15ml
Spices, herbs, garlic and onions		Use to introduce flavours and palatability to dishes and to help reduce your intake of added salt

CONSUME WEEKLY

Traditional Mediterranean dishes do not usually contain animal protein foods as the main ingredient.

Fish	2 or more servings	Fish is a good source of proteins and healthy fats/oils. A serving of oily fish per week is recommended. 1 serving = 115g (raw)
Legumes	2 or more servings	Legumes combined with cereals provide a healthy source of plant protein and fat. They are high in fibre content which has many benefits for health. 1 serving = 70g (raw)/140g (cooked/canned)
Potatoes	3 or less servings	Potatoes are part of many traditional recipes. Potatoes used are preferably fresh and cooked with minimal fat. 1 serving = 80g potato, preferably with skin
Olives, nuts and seeds	A handful	These serve as healthy snack alternatives being good sources of healthy fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals and fibre. Nuts: 80-90g per week (equivalent to 20g x 4-5 times a week); Seeds: 60-70g per week (equivalent to 15g x 4-5 times a week)
Eggs	2-4 servings	Eggs are a source of animal protein food. 1 serving = 1 egg
White meat	2 servings	Opt for lean meat. 1 serving = 100g (raw)
Red meat	Less than 2 servings	Eat smaller quantities and less frequently. 1 serving = 90g (raw)

CONSUME OCCASIONALLY (IF DESIRED)

Foods and drinks rich in sugar and unhealthy fats	Small quantities – consumed occasionally	Sugar, sweets, chocolate, sweet and savoury pastries; as well as fruit juices and soft drinks ⁵ .
Processed meat	Small quantities – consumed occasionally	Breaded and other ready-made protein foods e.g. nuggets, burgers, sausages, ham and canned meat.
Wine	Small quantities – consumed occasionally	If you opt to drink, limit your intake and have it with your meal. <i>Overconsumption is to be avoided at all times</i>

This table has been adapted from the 'Mediterranean diet pyramid: a lifestyle for today' Guidelines for the adult population by *Fundacion Dieta Mediterranea* Expert Group (2010 edition)

⁵ If these are consumed, have them with your meals.

