

### What is the Mediterranean Diet?

There's some confusion about what the Mediterranean Diet really is. It has been criticized for giving the public a seemingly free license to overindulge on endless amounts of olive oil, cheesy pastas and wine, which doesn't seem all that healthy. And it isn't.

According to the American Heart Association, a Mediterranean Diet consists of:

- \*High consumption of fruits, vegetables, bread and other cereals, potatoes, beans, nuts and seeds

- \*Olive oil is an important monounsaturated fat source

- \*Dairy products, fish and poultry are consumed in low to moderate amounts, and little red meat is eaten

- \*Eggs are consumed zero to four times a week

- \*Wine is consumed in low to moderate amounts

The nutritional magic of the Mediterranean diet lies in its emphasis on consuming lots of plants: vegetable, fruits, whole grains and legumes. The cuisine contains very little saturated fat.

The Mediterranean Diet first become noticed after World War II when a study examined the diets and health of almost 13,000 middle-aged men in the US, Japan, Italy, Greece (including Crete), the Netherlands, Finland and Yugoslavia. Surprisingly, well-fed American men had higher rates of heart disease than those in countries whose diets had been restricted by the deprivations of the war. Residents of Crete enjoyed the best cardiovascular health, a difference scientists largely ascribed to their diet based on fruits and vegetables, grains, legumes and fish. (Tufts Healthy & Nutrition Newsletter. September, 2013.)

Today, studies still show that eating the Mediterranean way can have a positive impact on reducing one's high blood pressure, risk for cancer and obesity along with other chronic diseases that tend to affect American eaters.