



Introduction



I believe what we put into our bodies can serve as a primary determinant of how we function, feel, and look. Whether you “eat to live” or “live to eat,” you can nurture your body through food choices. Food isn’t just fuel; it’s a means by which we can maintain our overall health and well-being. The countless vitamins and minerals in foods each have a purpose—they facilitate efficient operation of our body.

As a registered dietitian, my primary role is that of a health care provider, but I also bring a culinary background and passion. This passion goes beyond wanting to be healthy. It is a deep desire to help people reach their goals. It brings me tremendous joy and satisfaction to see my patients succeed in whatever it is they came to me to achieve. I love this field and how I can make a difference for people—and perhaps this love affair came from my upbringing.

Growing up in a large Greek family, I learned that everything centered on food. The smell of baking bread constantly filled the air. Our pantry staples included fresh fruits and vegetables, and olive oil—lots of it. As a child, I would get up early on Saturdays to cook my family breakfast, help my mother and *yiayia* (the Greek word for grandmother) cook traditional foods, and strive to make the perfect baklava. When I went off to college, it made total sense to major in food and restaurant management. I got a part-time job in hospital food service, an experience that quickly signaled to me that meals are not always prepared in the healthiest manner. The sodium, fat, and calorie counts were sorely excessive. With obesity levels in the country rising by epic proportions, and heart disease becoming the leading killer among Americans, I was alarmed. I knew I wanted to do more—to use my knowledge of food to help people get *healthy*. So I returned to school

for dietetics, got my master's of science in nutrition education from Columbia University, and became clinically trained in all areas of food and healthy eating.

Almost 20 years later, my passion continues. I have a private practice devoted to helping people lose weight, keep it off, and maintain healthy lifestyles. I provide therapeutic diets for people facing various diseases and maladies. They are living with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes, to name a few of their issues. Most of my patients come to me after struggling to lose weight without success. Their stories are moving: They have tried every diet on the market. They are downtrodden from counting points, spending money they don't have on shakes and supplements, and feeling heavier and sicker than ever. They are justifiably angry, sad, and frustrated. We talk, and we formulate a plan. This plan is not a diet in the way we think of diets; rather, it's a strategy for moving forward with a different mind-set—a plan for life.

After just a few days of eating better, my patients are calling me. Yes, they are losing weight. But they have been transformed in ways that surprise them—they feel energized, they're sleeping better, and they are happier. Best of all, they are, for the first time, hopeful. People who “couldn't lose a pound” were back in my office with tears of joy and messages of self-empowerment. Through education and guidance, they were able to break through the barriers that hold people back and find the way to enduring weight loss and optimum health.

If you have tried without success to lose weight, it's understandable you could feel daunted, even pessimistic, about the prospect. The Mediterranean diet is a common-sense approach to food that avoids hype, fads, and processed “weight-loss” novelties. We will explore the science behind the success of this diet. We'll discuss the importance of exercise, rest, relaxation, and mindfulness as they pertain to weight loss. And we'll illustrate the benefits of this diet beyond weight loss, including disease prevention.

Perhaps one of the less-touted reasons for its success is that the Mediterranean diet still provides the opportunity for people to “eat, drink, and be merry.” You will not be drinking a canned shake or

choking down a tasteless bar—quite the opposite. This is palate-pleasing, dinner-party-worthy fare that feels good and sticks to the ribs.

Research shows that the Mediterranean diet is one of the most successful diets out there in a sea of options, and you will soon see for yourself that this is truly a delicious, realistic, and sustainable method—both to lose weight and to maintain a healthy weight.

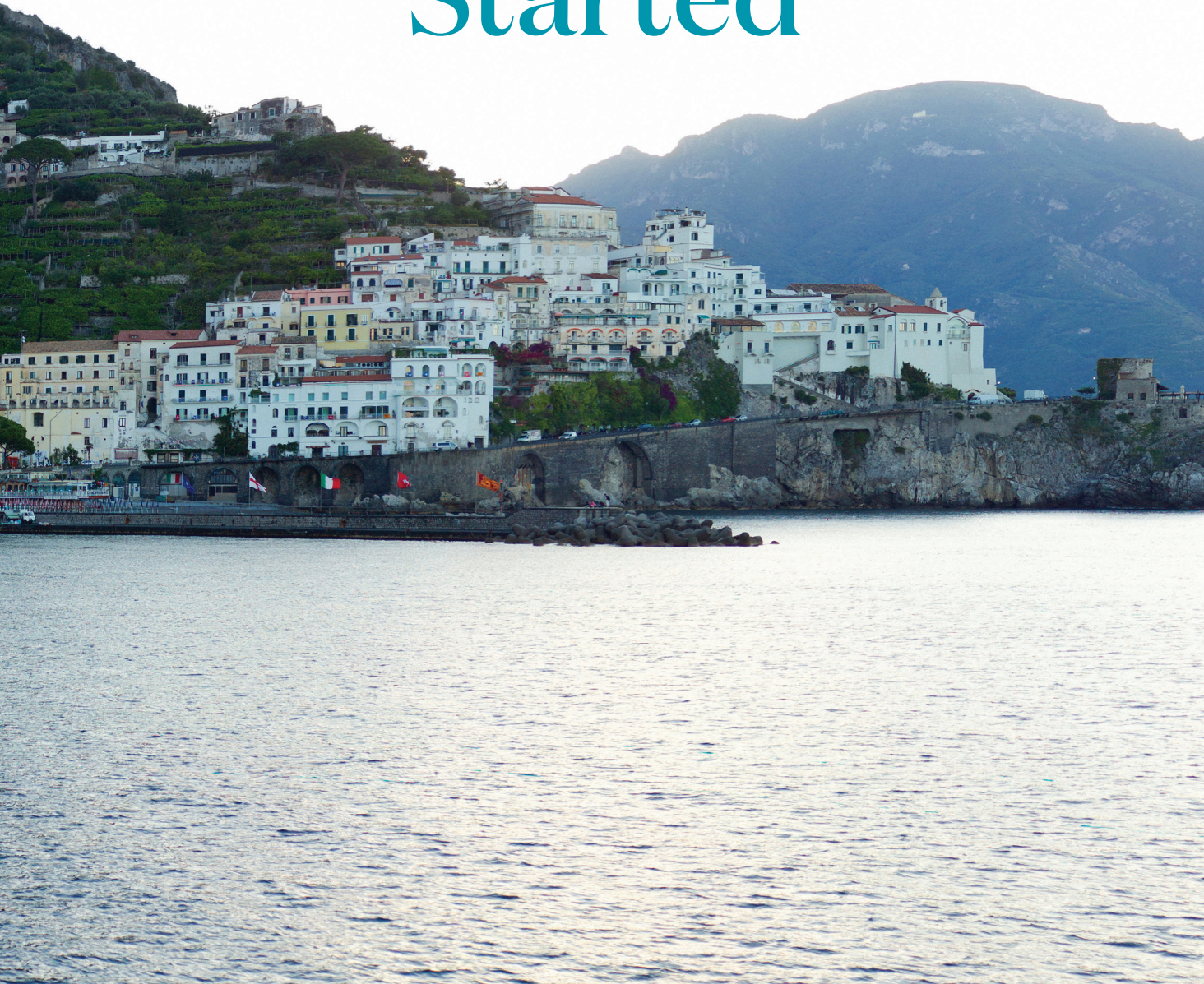
This book provides an actionable, easy-to-follow 28-day program to kick-start weight loss and put you on the path to a healthier, slimmer, happier you. The plan will help you lose weight, keep it off, and avoid a host of chronic diseases. This 28-day Mediterranean diet plan is easy to follow because it's filled with easy recipes and diet guidelines. Foods are simple to prepare, delicious, and completely versatile to appeal to your individual taste buds. This style of food is low in processed sugar; is full of fresh, nutrient-dense foods; and doesn't break the bank. And this plan allows you to be creative while still enjoying the foods you like—in moderation. You won't get bored, and you'll never feel like you are on a “diet”—these are all important to a successful long-term lifestyle adaptation.

I'm excited for you, so let's start building your toolbox for success!



PART 1

Getting Started







Your Mediterranean Diet Primer



If you have tried to lose weight before and failed, you are not alone. As a dietitian, I hear stories almost daily from people who have tried diet after diet only to gain the weight back. This 28-day Mediterranean diet is not a fad diet. It is a plan for life.

That said, it is understandable that most people want a quick fix, and in the search for rapid results, they fail. This plan shares time-tested Mediterranean customs relating to nutrition as well as exercise, with an approach proven successful, to set you on a winning course for life.

Pitfalls of the Standard American Diet

Despite the many healthy choices available to us, the standard American diet has historically placed little emphasis on fresh fruits, vegetables, or whole grains. While whole foods are gaining attention for their benefits, our “go-go” society, as a whole, relies far too heavily on processed foods, refined carbohydrates, fried and fast foods, red meats, sugars, high-fat dairy products, saturated and trans fats, and sodium. Such a diet, often devoid of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, can lead to deficiencies in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients essential to good health and even proper functioning of the body.

The standard American diet also includes chemicals, such as high-fructose corn syrup, trans fats, hydrogenated oils, white sugar, bleached and enriched flours, food dyes, and artificial flavors to name a few. These chemicals can increase the risk of health problems.

Data shows that in the United States:

- ◆ More than 2 in 3 adults are considered to be overweight or obese.
- ◆ More than 1 in 3 adults are considered to be obese.
- ◆ More than 1 in 20 adults are considered to have extreme obesity.

Consequently, people who are obese are at increased risk for many serious diseases and health conditions, including high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea and breathing problems, some cancers, mental illness, and body pain and difficulty with physical functioning.

Beneath the fast-food propensity of American society lurks a culprit. This culprit is stress, born of a must-do, checklist-based mentality. Stress muddles our priorities as whole foods from nature are traded in for quick fixes from a vending machine or drive-through. Unfortunately,

the same holds true for exercise. American society dictates we get as much done as possible in a hurry, which can leave us forgetting the last time we made a conscious decision to take the stairs.

The Mediterranean Diet & Weight Loss

Researchers conclude that a healthy diet and physical activity are essential to getting in shape. The 28-day Mediterranean diet does exactly that, targeting a combination of nutrition and exercise. “Mediterranean diet” refers to common dietary habits among countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. Although diets differ among these regions and countries, as a whole the traditional Mediterranean diet emphasizes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, and spices. The main source of fat in the Mediterranean diet is olive oil, a healthy monounsaturated fat. Poultry and dairy products such as cheese and yogurt are consumed in moderate amounts, and fish and seafood are eaten regularly. Red meat is eaten only on occasion.

This abundance of fresh foods translates to few hydrogenated oils and vast amounts of nutrients that benefit the body. In the Mediterranean, most fat intake comes from olive oil, nuts, and fish, which provide large quantities of beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. Spices are used often and generously, so salt is not a necessary seasoning. These collective factors work to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, reducing the risk of heart disease.

Many studies around the world have tested the Mediterranean diet’s effectiveness with regard to weight loss. A Harvard study showed that the Mediterranean diet is superior to other weight-loss diets, including low-fat, low-carb diets, and even diets created by major health organizations. Another, the PREDIMED study (PREvención con DIeta MEDiterránea), found that body weight decreased in the study group of those consuming a Mediterranean diet. Research has also shown that this type of eating can reduce the risk for developing certain diseases and cancers and improve the health of individuals with diabetes.

Eat Like a Mediterranean

Kali orexi! That’s “bon appétit” at a Greek table, where dining is a cause for celebration. The Mediterranean diet traditionally includes fruits, vegetables, pasta, and rice. As an example, Greeks eat very little red meat, but average nine servings a day of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Red meat is consumed only a few times a month, but Mediterraneans enjoy fish and poultry several times a week.

The grains consumed in the Mediterranean region are typically whole grains and usually contain very few unhealthy fats. Bread is an important part of this diet, but it is usually eaten plain or dipped in olive oil. Olive oil is also used for cooking, as is canola oil. Butter is not typically used. Mediterranean cooking uses a lot of herbs and spices instead of salt.

Nuts are another mainstay of the Mediterranean diet. Although they are high in fat, most of the fat is unsaturated. They’re also high in calories, but a handful a day packs a valuable nutrition and energy punch.

Water remains integral to most any diet, and the Mediterranean diet is no exception. Water goes hand in hand with the active lifestyle in the Mediterranean. Red wine can be enjoyed in moderation if desired. Beyond the food and drink, the traditional Mediterranean meal experience emphasizes the camaraderie of family or friends sharing the celebration.

Live Like a Mediterranean

Mediterranean people tend to be very active, but it’s not something they purposely seek out, like in a gym membership—it’s simply part of their lifestyle. Cultural differences, such as not having to rely on cars, and walking or biking for transportation, make for a naturally active lifestyle that boosts overall health. These people walk to the market, to visit friends and families, to their jobs, or just to take a stroll.

Mediterraneans also possess a traditional love for nature—a trait that shines through in their produce-rich diet. They tend to spend a great

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET PYRAMID

As illustrated in the pyramid, fresh fruits and vegetables, grains such as whole-wheat bread, pasta, or rice, and olive oil are important parts of every meal. Foods enjoyed daily include nuts, cheese, or yogurt, and red wine. Fish, eggs, poultry, and legumes are consumed several times a week, and meat is restricted to a few times a month.

