

Mediterranean Diet Pyramid Turns 10

Scientists, health experts, media and chefs celebrate the anniversary of the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid and growing evidence in its support.

In January 2003, over 300 scientists, dietitians, chefs, food manufacturers, interested consumers, and members of media met in Boston to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid. Respected members of these groups spoke on the scientific findings, public health messages, creative strategies and tasty recipes that lend ongoing support and credibility to the nutritious elements visually depicted in the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid.

Sponsored by the Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust, a non-profit food issues think tank in Boston, and the Harvard School of Public Health, the conference confirmed that the Mediterranean style diet is a healthy eating pattern and lifestyle that can be comfortably incorporated in the U.S. to promote good health.

The Mediterranean Diet Pyramid differs from the USDA Food Guide Pyramid in some fundamental ways:

Mediterranean Food Guide Pyramid	USDA Food Guide Pyramid
Promotes whole grains over refined (daily).	Doesn't distinguish between whole and refined grains (6-11 daily servings).
Promotes moderate use of healthy fats like olive oil, avocados and fish.	Recommends using all fats sparingly.
Promotes infrequent consumption of red meat and separates <i>different kinds</i> of protein with more frequent consumption of fish and poultry (weekly) and beans and nuts (daily).	All protein groups (meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans) are categorized together; eat 2-3 servings daily.
Emphasizes daily consumption of fruits and vegetables.	Also emphasizes daily consumption of fruits and vegetables.
Promotes daily physical activity.	No reference to exercise on pyramid.
Includes beverage recommendations (6 cups water daily, wine in moderation).	No beverage recommendations.

Both pyramids emphasize variety in food choices and are intended to promote optimal nutrition in our population. The USDA Food Guide Pyramid is currently being reevaluated and most scientists agree that it needs a major *facelift* to bring it up-to-date with our current knowledge about diet and nutrition.

In the meantime, we know that people from the Mediterranean region who follow the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle have traditionally had lower incidences of

overweight, heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic diseases. Science in last ten years has largely supported the recommendations found on the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, including the diet and exercise guidelines released by the National Academies of Science in September 2002.

With the celebration of the 10th anniversary and increasing scientific evidence in its favor, the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid seems here to stay.

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