

## ***The Lunchbox Nutritionist*** ***Kathleen Searles MS, RD, LDN***



With Valentine's Day coming in February there is no better time to focus on eating for a healthy heart! I hope you will enjoy learning about the Mediterranean diet and trying one - or all - of the featured recipes. Consider a gift from/to the heart this month too...schedule a consult for yourself or a loved one to get more suggestions for heart healthy foods that fit YOUR lifestyle!

I'll see you soon!

- Kathleen Searles

### **Mediterranean Diet for a Healthy Heart**



The Mediterranean Diet is the perfect blend of heart healthy food full of flavor, easy to prepare, and has been prescribed as the "diet" to live a long and healthy life.

For years the Mediterranean culture has been studied and the verdict is out! Not only does the Mediterranean diet contribute to a decreased risk for heart disease, diabetes, cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease; but the Mediterranean lifestyle also plays a major role in one's quality of life and longevity. The Mediterranean lifestyle includes slowing down to enjoy and savor the food that is served, sharing meals as a family in both the preparation and while eating, and engaging in regular physical activity.

#### **10 Principles from the Mediterranean Diet and Lifestyle That Are Good for Your Heart:**

1. Increase physical activity. Walk more. Take the stairs. Sign up for a walk or run. The point is the more you move the better it is for your heart. This is one key principle that people living the Mediterranean life do on a regular basis.
2. Eat mostly plant based foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts. Focus on

- consuming more foods that are grown from the earth and reduce intake of process and packaged foods.
3. Use olive oil and canola oil for cooking and flavoring instead of butter and other foods high in saturated fats.
  4. Flavor foods with fresh herbs and spices instead of salt.
  5. Eat fish and seafood at least twice a week.
  6. Get additional protein needs from poultry, eggs, cheese, yogurt, nuts and legumes.
  7. Limit intake of red meat to once a week or less.
  8. Consume red wine in moderation (2 drinks per day for men, 1 drink per day for women)
  9. Cook as a family and eat meals together.
  10. Slow down and enjoy the flavors of the food you are eating.
- The Mediterranean Diet is not at all about deprivation, but instead it is about eating foods that nourish the body while still providing pleasure at meal time.

## Heart-Healthy Cooking Tips



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To lower your risk of heart disease or to manage your existing disease, try these tips in preparing meals:

### **Limit Fat, Especially Saturated and Trans Fat**

- \* Select lean cuts of beef and pork, especially cuts with “loin” or “round” in their name.
- \* Remove all visible fat from meat before cooking. Take the skin off chicken or turkey before eating it.
- \* Cut back on processed meats high in saturated fat, such as hot dogs, salami and bacon.
- \* Bake, broil, roast, stew or stir-fry lean meats, fish or poultry.
- \* Drain the fat off of cooked, ground meat.
- \* When you make a stew, soup or gravy, refrigerate leftovers and skim off the fat with a spoon before reheating and serving.
- \* Eat fish regularly. Try different ways of cooking like baking, broiling, grilling and poaching to add variety.
- \* Eat plant foods as sources of protein, including soybeans, pinto beans, lentils and nuts.
- \* Replace higher-fat cheeses with lower-fat options like reduced-fat feta and part-skim mozzarella.
- \* Thicken sauces with evaporated non-fat milk instead of whole milk.
- \* Move toward using lower-fat milk and yogurt. Start with 2 percent products, then move to 1 percent and finally to fat-free to adjust to the new taste.
- \* Use liquid vegetable oils and soft margarine instead of stick margarine or shortening.
- \* Limit consumption of cakes, cookies, crackers, pastries, pies, muffins, doughnuts and French fries. These foods tend to be the biggest sources of trans fats. Many food manufacturers have removed trans fats from their foods. Check ingredient lists on food packages and

## News and Events:

### *Do you need a tune-up for a healthy heart?*

Call for an appointment to be sure you are eating to keep your heart beating to a healthy tune!

### Recipe of the Month: Special Edition - Valentine's Meal - from the Appetizer to Dessert

All Recipes are from *The Mediterranean Diet Cookbook for Dummies* by Meri Rafetto, RD and Wendy Jo Peterson, MS, RD.

#### **Appetizer: Tomato and Mozzarella Bites**

Prep time: 10 minutes Cook Time: 5 minutes Yield: 16 servings

#### Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup pomegranate juice
- 4 vine-ripened tomatoes, sliced 1/4 inch thick
- Sea salt to taste
- 16 fresh basil leaves
- 1 pound fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced 1/4 inch thick
- 1/4 cup olive oil

#### Directions:

1. In a small saucepan, cook the vinegar and pomegranate juice over medium heat until it reduces by half., approximately 5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, layer the sliced tomatoes on a serving platter and sprinkle each with sea salt. Layer a basil leaf over each tomato and top with a mozzarella slice. Drizzle the olive oil and the balsamic pomegranate reduction over the tomato and mozzarella bites.
3. Pierce each mozzarella bite with a toothpick and serve.

Nutrition per serving: 133 Calories; 10 g Fat (4 Saturated); 22 mg Cholesterol; 182 mg Sodium; 4 g Carbohydrates; 7 g Protein

#### **Entree: Baked Salmon with Fresh Vegetables**

avoid products containing partially hydrogenated oils.

\* Use non-stick spray or a nonstick pan for cooking. Try broth as a substitute for oil when sautéing foods.

\* Use oils such as canola, olive and soybean in recipes and for sautéing.

\* Make salad dressings with olive, walnut or pecan oil.

### **Eat Foods Containing Omega-3 Fatty Acids**

\* Select oils that provide omega-3 fat, such as canola or soybean oil.

\* Add flaxseed oil, which is very high in omega-3 fat, to foods like salad dressings. If you use flaxseed, be sure it is ground up. Your body cannot digest the beneficial fat if the seeds are left whole.

\* The walnut is the only common nut with alpha linolenic acid. Try walnut oil in salad dressings, too.

\* Eat two 4-ounce portions of fatty fish each week, like salmon, albacore tuna (in water, if canned), mackerel and sardines.

\* Some chickens are given feed that is high in omega-3s so their eggs will contain more as well. When buying eggs, check the package label. Remember all egg yolks contain cholesterol.

\* Fish oil supplements are acceptable for those with heart disease. The recommended dose is 1 gram of omega-3 fatty acids from a combination of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) per day.

### **Reduce Salt (Sodium)**

\* Prepare foods at home so you can control the amount of salt in your meals.

\* Use as little salt in cooking as possible. You can cut at least half the salt from most recipes.

\* Do not salt food at the table.

\* Do not use mixes or “instant” products that already contain salt or additives with sodium.

\* Select no-sodium or low-sodium canned foods, such as vegetables or tuna.

\* Add herbs in place of salt when cooking.

\* Season foods with herbs, spices, garlic, onions, peppers and lemon or lime juice to add flavor.

### **Make Healthier Carbohydrate Choices**

\* When baking, use recipes that call for whole grains and flours made from whole grains.

\* Reduce the amount of sugar in recipes. It can often be cut in half.

\* Instead of sugar, use noncaloric sweeteners in drinks and sucralose when baking.

\* Stir-fry fiber-rich vegetables, such as peppers, cabbage, broccoli and carrots.

\* Add dried beans and lentils to homemade soup.

## **Quote of the Month**

**“Follow your heart, but be quiet for a while first. Ask questions, then feel the answer. Learn to trust your heart.”**

### **Contact Information:**

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Prep time: 5 minutes Cook Time: 35 minutes Yields 4 servings

Ingredients:

1 lemon, cut into 1/4 inch slices

1 1/2 pounds skin on salmon fillets

1/2 tsp sea salt

3 Roma or plum tomatoes, cut into 1/4 inch slices

1 medium onion, 1/4 inch slices

1/2 pound mushrooms, diced

1/2 cup parsley, chopped

1/4 cup white wine

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 F

2. Place a large piece of foil onto a baking sheet. Lay half of the lemon slices in the center of the foil and center of the salmon (skin side down) on top. Sprinkle the surface of the salmon with sea salt.

3. Layer the tomatoes, onions, mushrooms, parsley, and remaining lemon slices on top of the fish. Drizzle with the wine and fold over the edges of the foil to seal the salmon in the packet.

4. Bake the salmon for 45 minutes. Remove from oven, discard the top layers of lemons and serve, watching out for steam as you open the packet. Nutrition per serving: 271 Calories; 6 g Fat (1 g Saturated); 88 mg Cholesterol; 422 mg Sodium; 11 g Carbohydrates; 2 g Dietary Fiber; Protein 37 g.

### **Side Dish: Wild Rice Pilaf**

Prep Time: 12 minutes Yield: 8 servings

Ingredients:

2 cups wild rice, cooked

2 cups orzo, cooked

2 cups baby spinach leaves, chopped

1/4 cup Kalamata olives, pitted

1/4 cup fresh dill, chopped

1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

1/4 cup olive oil

Juice of 1 lemon

1 cup grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise

Salt and pepper to taste

2 oz feta cheese, crumbled

Directions:

1. In a large bowl combine the rice, orzo, spinach, olives, dill, and olive oil. Toss to coat.

2. Add the lemon juice and gently stir in the tomatoes and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Top with cheese and serve.

Nutrition per serving: 186 Calories; 9 g Fat (2 g Saturated); 6 mg Cholesterol; 211 mg Sodium; 21 g Carbohydrates; 2 g Dietary Fiber; 5 g Protein

### **Dessert: Date and Walnut Drops**

Prep time: 10 minutes Yields 24 servings

Ingredients:

24 dates

24 almonds or walnut halves

1/2 cup sugar

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Zest of 1 orange

Directions:

1. Cut each date lengthwise and remove and discard the seed. Stuff each date with 1 almond or walnut.

2. In a small bowl, combine the sugar and orange zest. Gently roll the stuffed dates in the sugar and serve.

Nutrition per serving: 109 Calories; 3 g Fat; 0mg Cholesterol; 0 mg Sodium; 23 g Carbohydrates; 2 g Dietary Fiber; 1 g Protein.

[Book can purchased by clicking here.](#)



### **About Kathleen Searles, MS, RD, LDN**

I am a Registered Dietitian and am licensed to practice in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. The exciting field of nutrition has been my passion ever since I took a foods class with my friends in high school. Through my work in different states and different settings I have developed my philosophy of helping people improve their diets by finding foods that fit into their particular routines, budgets, and preferences. I look forward to helping you solve your nutrition challenges with tasty and satisfying foods.