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### Oldways Updates Med Diet Pyramid

Nov 26, 2008



An international group of over 20 scientific experts has updated the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid to emphasize the key role foods from plant sources play in good nutrition. The scientists convened at Oldways' 15th Anniversary Mediterranean Diet Conference, held last week in Cambridge, Mass.

"It's been 15 years since Oldways introduced the Mediterranean-style diet and Mediterranean Diet Pyramid here in the United States," noted K. Dun Gifford, founder and president of Boston-based Oldways. "While the pyramid's core philosophy hasn't changed, we've streamlined the graphics to present a contemporary approach to delicious healthy eating, based on the overwhelming research about the benefits of the Mediterranean Diet."

The simplified new graphic lays stress on basing every meal on plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains (mostly whole), beans, seeds, nuts, herbs and spices, and olive oil, for maximum healthfulness. While these foods have always constituted the core of the pyramid, they have now been combined in one section to illustrate their equal important, and that their benefits stem from being eaten together.

Other changes include the addition of "mostly whole" to the longstanding recommendation of grains, in reference to the growing body of knowledge that whole grains deliver health benefits lacking in refined grains; the addition of herbs and spices to the base of the pyramid to reflect new research on their health benefits, as well as their dominant role in Mediterranean flavor profile; and the recommendation to eat fish at least twice a week, along with small portions of cheese, yogurt, eggs, and poultry, if desired. As always, the pyramid advises that sweets and meats be eaten sparingly.

Additionally, a section at the pyramid's base emphasizes the importance of physical activity and enjoying meals with family and friends.

Although moderate wine consumption continues to be a part of the Mediterranean Diet, but the pyramid now recommends regularly drinking water, instead of less healthy beverages.

"With obesity and diet-related chronic diseases at an all-time high, we felt it was important to review the hundreds of new scientific studies that join the archive of high-level research on the healthfulness of eating a Mediterranean-style diet, and update the pyramid," said Frank Sacks, MD, Professor of Cardiovascular Disease Prevention, Dept. of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School, and co-chair of the scientific committee. "These studies suggest that healthy diet and lifestyle practices, like those associated with the Mediterranean Diet, can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and more."

Rather than separating foods into "good" or "bad" categories, the Mediterranean Diet promotes a lifestyle including eating from a well-rounded menu of largely plant life, regular exercise and enjoying the company of friends and family.

In other conference news, Oldways and the Mediterranean Foods Alliance have rolled out the Med Makeover Widget, a tool for consumers interested in adopting the Mediterranean Diet. The free widget was created to help people world increase their Med Diet Score by selecting such goals as "Be More Active," or "Eat More Fruits and Veggies." Once these are chosen, the widget sends the consumer a daily "nudge," such as "Dip carrot sticks, pepper chunks, and other veggies in hummus," to help change habits connected to that goal.

A beta version of the widget for Facebook is now available; final versions, which will incorporate the updated Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, will roll out by the end of the year for Facebook and the Web, with an iPhone version to come in 2009.

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