

Go Mediterranean! Camerota's Cupboard (Originally Authored September, 2001 and published to a new 2008 email network)

When I was growing up in Philadelphia, my family ate what is now called the Mediterranean diet. I was raised in an Italian-American neighborhood and 2 of my grandparents were born in Italy. I didn't know then it was the Mediterranean diet. It was just the way my mother, all my relatives, and most of the people we knew cooked.

Research now suggests that it is a healthy diet that seems to prevent disease and prolong life, I am sometimes asked what it consists of. A search of the Internet as well as books and articles by nutritionists reveal basic principles that may differ in details. From time to time in this column, I will offer some approaches with recipes. Among the benefits of this cuisine are its familiarity and the availability of ingredients for its recipes. Suzanne Hopper, a nutritionist at the Nutrition Council of Greater Cincinnati, has been extremely generous in providing the nutrient analyses of recipes I've offered to you. When I consulted with her about the Mediterranean diet, she provided the following material for this month's column.

Going Mediterranean (From the Nutrition Council of Greater Cincinnati):

The health benefits of a Mediterranean diet have been recognized for years. People living in the Mediterranean region tend to have a much lower rate of heart disease and a longer life expectancy than people living in other parts of the world. Some researchers are promoting the Mediterranean style of eating as the optimal diet.

While not all nutritionists agree that a Mediterranean diet is the only way to eat, most do agree that it is a healthy way to eat and that it certainly tastes good. The Mediterranean region includes Greece, southern Italy, Spain, Portugal, southern France, parts of North Africa, parts of Turkey and parts of the Middle East. The traditional diets of these countries vary considerably but do share some common characteristics.

Here are some tips for going Mediterranean:

- Base your meals on plant foods – bread and grains (including pasta, rice, couscous, polenta, bulgur wheat and other grains), fruits and vegetables, beans, nuts and seeds.

2. Add tomatoes with juice, peeled garlic cloves, water and rosemary. Simmer covered on low heat for 10 minutes until vegetables are soft.
3. Add beans and continue to simmer for 5 minutes more until beans are heated.
4. Add uncooked pasta to the pan, cover and cook over medium heat until the pasta is tender, about 7-10 minutes.
5. Remove garlic cloves before serving.

Makes 4 servings. Nutrition information: 315 calories, 5 gm fat.

Adapted from: *Monday to Friday Cookbook* by Michele Urvater, 1991.

Hummus

1 can (16 oz.) chick peas, drained (save liquid) and rinsed.

1 Tbs. lemon juice (or more to taste)

2 Tbs. tahini*

1 clove garlic (or 1/4 tsp. garlic powder)

salt and pepper as desired

- In a blender or food processor, mix the chick peas, 1/4 cup reserved liquid, lemon juice and remaining ingredients. Blend until smooth. Garnish with

fresh chopped parsley, if desired.

- Serve with pita bread, spread on bagels, or use as a dip for vegetables.

Makes 8 – 1/4 cup servings. Per serving: 80 calories, 3 grams fat.

From: *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook*

*tahini is sesame paste and can be found in most large grocery stores either with

imported foods or health foods.

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Buon appetito!