

Mediterranean Diet on a Budget

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Studies show that plant-based eating plans, such as the Mediterranean diet, can slash your grocery bill by about 30%. That means eating well doesn't need to be expensive.

The Mediterranean diet is linked to a lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. This plant-based diet emphasizes more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, olive oil and suggests modest amounts of fish and dairy.

While a fully plant-based Mediterranean diet is the most affordable, adding a bit of animal-based foods (e.g., for example, have a portion of red meat no more than once a week and replace it with tofu or beans for protein instead) can still reduce costs by 14%. **The bottom line?** Plant foods cost less than animal foods. So, cutting back on animal-based foods and choosing more plant-based options are both healthier and more affordable. It's a win-win.

You can enjoy the Mediterranean diet on a budget by building meals around plant-based proteins. Beans, lentils, tofu and chickpeas are a fraction of the cost of meat or fish. Canned beans are convenient and inexpensive, and dried beans are even cheaper. Use them in soups, salads, stews or pasta dishes to add filling protein and fiber.

Seasonal and frozen produce can also help keep costs down. Frozen vegetables and fruits are picked at peak ripeness and flash frozen, so they retain their nutrients and often cost less than fresh. Choosing in-season produce stretches your budget further.

Whole grains, such as brown rice, oats, barley and whole-wheat pasta, are the low-cost backbone of many Mediterranean dishes. These foods provide long-lasting energy and important nutrients such as fiber and B-vitamins.

Enjoy nutrient-rich and affordable dishes such as:

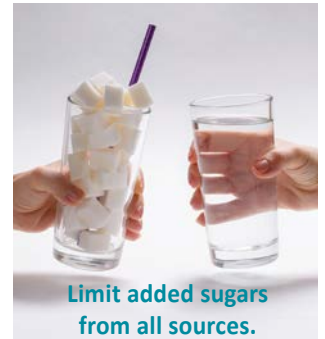
- Bean and vegetable soup.
- Sheet pan tofu and vegetables.
- Pasta with lentil tomato sauce.
- Chickpea and vegetable tagine (stew).
- Grain bowl with barley, beans and vegetables.
- Rice and bean stuffed peppers.

These options deliver the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet without straining your grocery budget.



Sugar vs. High Fructose Corn Syrup

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



When you reach for a can of soda, you may wonder if it is better to choose one sweetened with sugar or high fructose corn syrup? Both have similar negative health impacts when consumed in excess. But what's the difference between these sweeteners and why the debate?

Sugar is a granulated powder made from sugar cane or beets. It is 50% glucose and 50% fructose. HFCS is a liquid sweetener made from corn. It's usually 55% fructose and 45% percent glucose, though it can be processed with different glucose-fructose ratios.

Which is better? Some people worry that HFCS is more harmful than sugar because it is slightly higher in fructose. However, research has not found clear evidence that HFCS is worse for your health than sugar. Your body breaks down both types of sweeteners to units of fructose and glucose, so HFCS and sugar end up the same.

The health effects of both sweeteners come down to quantity, not the type. Studies consistently show that diets high in added sugars, regardless of the type, are linked to a higher risk of:

- Obesity.
- Heart disease.
- Some cancers.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Fatty liver disease.
- Gout

The best approach is to limit added sugars from all sources. The World Health Organization recommends no more than 10% of calories from sugar (below 5% is even better), which is about 12 teaspoons (48 grams) per day in the average 2,000-calorie diet. Sodas, pastries, candy and many ultra-processed foods contain sugar, so it's easy to consume too much.

Look at the amount of added sugars on Nutrition Facts labels. Good to know: 4 grams is equal to 1 teaspoon of sugar. So, a can of soda with 40 grams of sugar is equal to 10 teaspoons of sugar. For many, reducing soda intake is the quickest way to reduce sugar intake.

Vitamin D and Sunscreen

Vitamin D plays a big role in keeping you healthy, such as supporting disease prevention, a strong immune system, bone growth and strength.

Vitamin D is produced naturally when your skin is exposed to sunlight. At the same time, using sunscreen (at least SPF 30 or higher, broad spectrum and water resistant) is one of the best ways to protect yourself from getting skin cancer. So you may wonder: Does sunscreen prevent vitamin D production, and what can I do to ensure I get enough vitamin D?

The good news: Clinical studies haven't found that wearing sunscreen daily lowers your vitamin D levels. In fact, most research shows that people who wear sunscreen regularly still maintain the vitamin D levels their bodies need.



To make sure you're getting enough vitamin D:

- 1 Eat foods naturally high in vitamin D, such as eggs; milk, yogurt; almond milk; soy milk; pork loin; fish high in omega-3 fatty acid such as salmon, sardines, swordfish and tuna; and fortified cheese, orange juice and cereal.
- 2 Take daily vitamin D supplements. **Note:** If you take calcium, it may already contain vitamin D. Check the label.
- 3 Ensure you get the recommended vitamin D daily allowance of 600 IU (for ages one to 70) and 800 IU for those older than 70 years. Talk to your health care provider about checking your vitamin D levels to confirm you're getting enough.

Q: Why do mosquitoes like me?

A: Mosquitoes are more likely to bite certain people. The clothes you wear, the skin care products you use, and the foods you eat are important factors.

Clothes: Mosquitoes prefer bare, uncovered skin. With skin covered by clothing, research shows mosquitoes more often bite people wearing red, orange, black or cyan (blue-green). Conversely, people who wear green, purple, blue or white and those who wear loose-fitting styles have better mosquito protection.

Skin care products: Personal products with fragrances, especially strong floral scents, make you more attractive to mosquitoes. So do moisturizers, anti-aging creams or other skin care products that contain lactic acid or alpha-hydroxy acid.

Food and diet: Consuming beer or Limburger cheese when you're in mosquito territory may increase the risk of bites.

Physical attributes: People who are bigger, more physically active, or who sweat more produce larger amounts of carbon dioxide and lactic acid. These chemicals act as mosquito attractants. Carbon dioxide in exhaled breath can draw the bugs from up to 115 feet away.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Get the Drop on Humidity

Besides being an uncomfortable nuisance during summer, humidity can also negatively affect your health. High humidity makes it harder for everyone to breathe but especially if you have a lung or breathing condition.

When combined with high heat, it can also affect your body's ability to cool down, leading to a greater chance of heat-related illnesses and cardiovascular risks as your body works harder to cool down.

Humidity can impact your mental state as well because it limits your opportunities for outdoor activities, which can increase stress, anxiety and irritability. It can also interfere with sleep, sap your motivation and make it tougher to stay focused.



When the air outside feels like a sauna, these tips can help you stay cool and comfortable:

- Use a dehumidifier and stay in an air-conditioned environment. If you don't have air conditioning, use fans.
- Keep windows closed and blinds or curtains drawn to block out the sun's heat.
- Stay hydrated. Keep a water bottle on your desk, nightstand and with you while you are outdoors.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Wear lightweight, breathable clothing.
- Stay in the shade (and don't forget to wear sunscreen).
- Check humidity levels and heat advisories. If they're too high, change your outdoor plans — maybe swim instead of going for a run.
- Participate in outdoor activities earlier in the day. Try to avoid direct sun exposure when UV radiation is highest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Smart Moves Toolkit: personalbest.com/extras/26V5tools. Printable download: [Deciphering Medical Studies](#).

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