Mediterranean Diet & Lifestyle

What is a Mediterranean diet?
The origins of the Mediterranean diet date back to the ancient civilizations of Greece, Egypt and Italy as well as many other countries that border the Mediterranean Sea. This specific diet has long been thought to bring positive health benefits such as improvements in cardiovascular health, weight loss, lowering cancer risk and much more. Because of the vast number of countries that border the Mediterranean, there isn’t standard “Mediterranean diet” because each country has its own influence on the Mediterranean diet. However, there are certain characteristics that make a meal “Mediterranean”:

Here are the main principles of the diet:
- Increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts
- Replacing butter with healthy fats such as olive oil
- Using herbs and spices for flavor as opposed to salt
- Eating fish and poultry at least twice a week
- Limiting red meat consumption to a few times a month

How does the Mediterranean Diet benefit people with HIV/AIDS?
According to the American Heart Association, the risk for heart disease is 70-80% higher in people with HIV compared to those without it. Although the HIV virus itself is thought to have some part in this, it is the HIV medications that have been strongly associated with the development of lipodystrophy, a disorder that causes a rise in lipid (fat) levels in your body as well as causing abnormal shifts in fat distribution. For instance, it is common to lose fat in the arms and legs, buttocks and face and accumulate fat in regions around the organs in the abdomen, the back of the neck (buffalo hump), breast, and just under the skin (lipomas). This becomes problematic as increased lipids in the blood, especially triglycerides and cholesterol can increase the risk of heart attack or stroke. Accumulation of fat around the abdominal region is also linked to increased risk for cardiovascular diseases.

By replacing unhealthy fats such as butter and lard with healthier fats such as olive oil and fatty fishes, you are significantly reducing the amount of trans and saturated fats and replacing them with mono-and polyunsaturated fats that contain omega-3 fatty acids which are anti-inflammatory and help protect the body against free radical damage that causes inflammation within the body. Refer to the list on the right for different sources and types of fat for more information.

Remember, the Mediterranean diet is more than just about food. It is a lifestyle choice and the mindset you have when it comes to the things you eat all the way to the things you do throughout the day. Diet and food alone is not the solution, it is important to remember to incorporate exercise into your daily routine and get at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day.

Fats to Choose:
- Olive Oil
- Canola Oil
- Peanut Oil
- Safflower Oil
- Sesame Oil
- Avocados
- Peanuts
- Macadamia nuts
- Olives

Polyunsaturated:
- Grapeseed Oil
- Walnut Oil
- Sunflower Oil
- Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, herring, trout)
- Flaxseeds
- Chia seeds

Fats to Limit:
- Fatty beef
- Lamb
- Pork
- Poultry with skin
- Lard and cream
- Butter
- Dairy products made from whole or 2% milk

Fats to Avoid:
- Margarine
- Cookies
- Frozen pies
- Frozen pizza
- Doughnuts

* Some plant-based oils such as palm oil, palm kernel oil and coconut oil also contain saturated fats but do not contain cholesterol.
Fruit of the Quarter: Mango

Fun Facts: Mangoes are native to the tropical climates of southern Asia but are now grown around the world. Mangoes are now sold year round but the springtime is when the fruit is at its best. Mangoes come in a various shapes, sizes and colors such as yellow, orange, red and green. They are traditionally eaten as a dessert itself or part of dessert but now are incorporated into other meals and into drinks like smoothies.

Health Benefits: Mangoes are a great source of vitamin C, vitamin A, and vitamin B6 that help with things like vision, and boosting your immune system. One mango also contains 1-3g of fiber, and is very low in saturated fats helping both your digestive and cardiovascular system respectively. Phytochemicals are also included in mangoes and provide a boost in immune function and can further help reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions.

Selection Tips: When it comes to picking the perfect mango you are going to have to use your sense of sight, smell and touch. When you first pick up a mango you are going to want to inspect it for its shape. A good mango should somewhat resemble a football-shape and appear full, plump and rounded especially around the stem. Often times mangoes have brown spots or speckles which is perfectly normal. Secondly, you are going to want to lightly press on the mango. A ripe mango should be soft to the touch just like an avocado or peach; however, you don’t want the mango to be too mushy to where your fingers sink into the fruit. Lastly, you should smell the mango around the stem. A nice ripe mango will give off a sweet, fragrant and fruity aroma. Contrary to popular belief, the color of the mango does not tell you too much about a mango, just avoid any mangoes with visible mold!

Storage Tips: You can store mangoes at room temperature until they become ripe. However, if you decide you do not want to eat the mango once it is ripe, you can place a mango into a plastic bag and place it in the fridge. Make sure to eat them within a couple of days because they will eventually become bad! Mangoes can also be frozen for a longer shelf life. The skin might become black but the flesh will stay in good condition.

Preparation Tips: The easy part about mangoes is that they are usually eaten raw and very minimal preparation is needed. Simply slice, cube or cut the mango however you would like and eat or place it into whatever dish you are preparing. As mentioned before, you can also throw mangoes into a blender and make a smoothie.

Herb of the Quarter: Mint

The origins of mint have been traced back to Asia and the Mediterranean regions of the world. It is a versatile herb and has been known to be used both for dietary and medicinal purposes. The Greeks used to use mint to clean their banqueting tables and added it to their water when bathing to cleanse their bodies. The Romans added mint to their sauces for both flavor and to aid in digestion. Nowadays in modern times, mint is commonly used as fresheners and incorporated into many food and beverages such as teas and desserts. Mint is now even used for things such as limiting the symptoms of nausea and vomiting. There are over a hundred different species of mint but the most popular types that are commonly used today are peppermint, spearmint, apple mint, chocolate mint and lemon mint. Mint is a great low-calorie option when it comes to flavoring foods and beverages.

How to get mint? There are many options when it comes to acquiring mint. You can simply go to a grocery store and purchase mint off the shelf, you can go to your local farmer’s market and buy it fresh from a farmer or if you are feeling adventurous you can even plant it yourself! Luckily the spring is a great time to plant mint so get planting!

Storage Tips: Mint is best used fresh, however, if you were to store mint the best way is to wrap the mint with a damp paper towel making sure it is not too wet. Once wrapped up, place the mint leaves into an airtight container or bag and place it in the fridge. This method of storage will keep the mint fresh for up to two weeks.

Preparation Tips: Luckily, just like a mango, mint requires very little preparation and is usually served fresh as a garnish or crushed/chopped and incorporated into part of a recipe.