WHY YOUR PANTRY SHOULD GET A MEDITERRANEAN MAKEOVER

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BY MICHELE REDMOND

If your pantry doesn't inspire dreams of a Mediterranean vacation, it may be time for a food rehaul. Adding Mediterranean staples to your non-perishable food storage can increase the flavor and nutrition of your family meals. Jarred, dried, cured and fermented foods have a long shelf life, ensuring your kitchen will always be stocked with the quick, nourishing meals found on Greek seaports and Italian farms.

The Mediterranean diet offers diverse foods, making it easy to go Medi with your pantry staples. Traditionally, the daily menu is plant-based with fish, shellfish, poultry, eggs and dairy eaten in small portions throughout the week. Vegetables, beans, cooking grains, cereals, breads, nuts, seeds, fruits and olive oil dominate the Mediterranean eating style. These foods offer ready-to-go ingredients for dozens of flavorful meals and appetizers.

Staples can be categorized into protein, fiber (grains, vegetables and fruit) and flavor-boosting ingredients. Mix and match categories to create wholesome appetizers, side dishes and meals. For example, pick a protein staple (cannellini beans), add flavorful veggies (sun-dried tomatoes, kalamata olives and artichoke hearts), then toss with olive oil, vinegar and chili flakes for a quick, fuss-free main dish salad.

While a Mediterranean diet can save you time in the kitchen, it also improves heart health thanks to phytonutrients: high fiber foods and omega-3 fatty acids that contribute to decreases in insulin resistance, cholesterol and

Mediterranean Pantry Examples

BENEFICIAL PROTEINS

Fish: Sardines, anchovies, clams, tuna*
Pulses: Cannellini, chickpea, lentils
Nuts: Almonds, walnuts, pistachio
**check sustainability sourcing*

BENEFICIAL GRAINS

Pasta and Grains: Whole wheat, spelt, farro, polenta, arborio rice, bulgur, orzo
Flours: Chickpea or buckwheat flours (non-gluten), all-purpose, whole wheat

FLAVORFUL "PRODUCE"

Heat: Hot peppers, pepperoncinis, garlic
Savory and Sweet: Peppers, tomatoes (sauces, paste, dried, oil-cured)
Acidic and Salty: Artichoke hearts, olives, capers, cornichons
Fruits: Dried figs, dates, currants, apricots

inflammation and improved glucose metabolism. Weight control, improved brain function, and reduced risk of cancer are other potential benefits.

The word "diet" evokes hassles, failures and eating restrictions, but foods from the Mediterranean offer balanced, flavorful, nutrient-rich eating. This way of cooking embraces the original meaning of "diet" as the daily habit of eating for pleasure, meals with family and friends, and making time to appreciate food. And even on busy days, it's good to know you can rely on your pantry full of Mediterranean goodness to support your wellbeing with stress-free, satisfying meals. ■

Resources:
health.harvard.edu/blog/adopt-a-mediterranean-diet-now-for-better-health-later-201311066846
oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet/traditional-med-diet

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FLAVOR BOOSTERS AND OIL

Tangy Brighteners: Vinegar, mustard
Flavors: Fennel, thyme, red chili flakes, oregano, rosemary, coriander, cayenne
Oils: Extra-virgin olive, grapeseed