

INTRODUCING THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Conner Middelman, Nutritionist

www.modernmediterranean.com



What the Mediterranean diet is NOT

- **A weight-loss diet*** (though you *can* lose weight eating this way)
- **A veg(etari)an diet** (though it's heavily plant-rich and therefore "plant-based")
- **A low-fat or low-carb diet** (though you *can* eat a low-fat or low-carb Mediterranean diet if that's what works best for you)
- **An exclusion diet** (e.g., paleo, keto or gluten-free)
- **A diet where you only eat dishes from the Mediterranean region** (North American, Latin American or Asian meals also can be "Mediterranean")

****Diaita*** [δίαιτα] is the ancient Greek word for "healthy way of living," not "diet"

What the Mediterranean diet IS

- **Ancient and time-honored** (it has evolved organically for over 5,000 years)
- **Delicious** (assuming you like vegetables, fruits, olive oil, cheese, eggs, nuts, beans, fish, meat, herbs & spices)
- **Simple** (most Mediterranean food is peasant food – “cucina povera”)
- **Versatile** (suits omnivores, vegetarians, low-carbers, keto dieters, etc.)
- **Inexpensive** (esp. if you eat mostly plant foods)
- **Environmentally friendly**
- **Science-based** (see next slide)

Scientific pedigree

In over 10,000 studies published in peer-reviewed medical journals the Mediterranean diet is associated with a reduced risk of:

- Heart attack & stroke
- Type-2 diabetes
- Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)
- Hypertension
- Obesity (esp. around the abdomen)
- Depression
- Dementia

Write-ups of recent Mediterranean-diet research [here](#).

So, what is the Mediterranean diet?



Mediterranean Diet*: A Timeless Classic

- **Minimally processed** foods
- Lots of seasonal **vegetables & fruits**
- Lots of *different* foods (**dietary variety**)
- **Healthy fats**
- High in **legumes, nuts, seeds**
- Aromatic **herbs & spices**
- Moderate **oily fish, egg** intake
- **Moderate dairy** intake (mostly cheese, yogurt & kefir)
- **Moderate meat** intake
- Moderate **alcohol** (with meals)
- **Conviviality, joy of eating, absence of guilt**
- **Plus: Walking & siestas**

6 Ways to Mediterraneanize your Diet

1. Eat Real Food
2. Rule of Thirds
3. Variety
4. Pro- and prebiotic foods
5. Prepare your own meals
6. Enjoy, don't endure

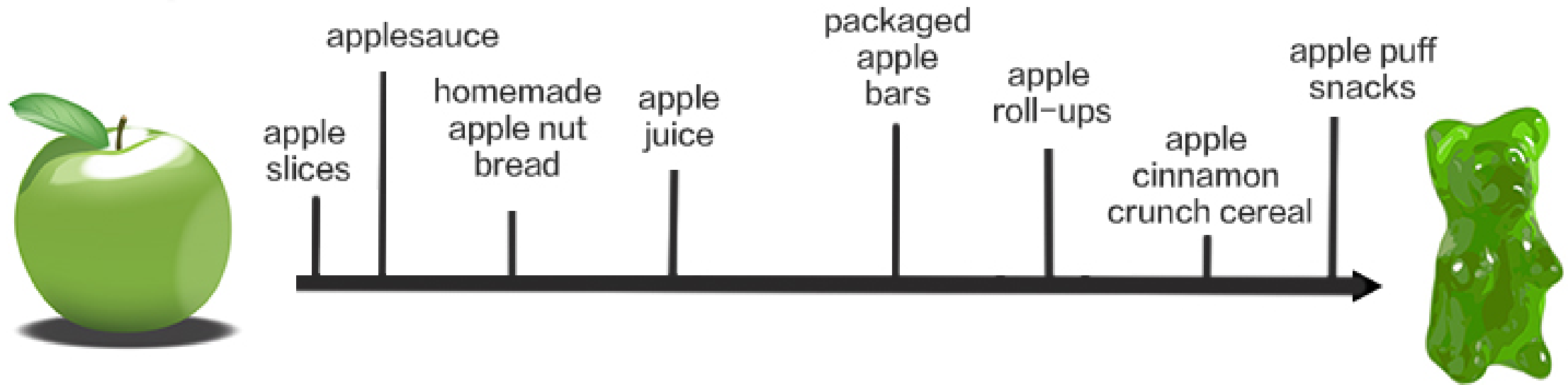


1. EAT REAL FOOD...

... and minimize processed food (*occasional treats*)

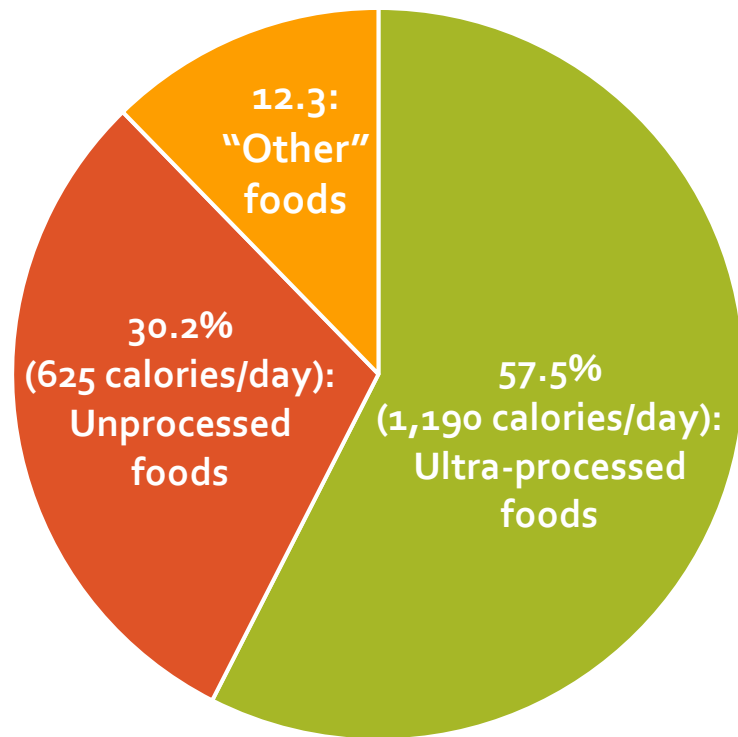
	NATURAL	PROCESSED	ULTRA-PROCESSED
TOMATOES	 1 INGREDIENTS	 11 INGREDIENTS	 26 INGREDIENTS
RASPBERRIES	 1	 6	 25
CHICKEN	 1	 10	 16

Graphic from [Nutritional Doublethink article](#) on food processing.



With every step of processing there is a loss of nutrients and a gain in food additives.

Where Americans' calories come from



- Ultra-processed foods (e.g., soft drinks, cookies, salty snacks, french fries, packaged bread & baked goods)
- Minimally processed/unprocessed food (e.g., fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, eggs, dairy, legumes, nuts, whole grains)
- Other (includes cheese, pickled foods, nut butters)

Data from [this article](#) in the *British Medical Journal*.

An under-nourished nation

Unfortunately, most of us don't get the essential nutrients (protein, fat, fiber, vitamins, minerals, etc.) we need from our food. A US government survey that studied 16,444 people four years and older found inadequate nutrient intakes across the board. For example --

- 94.3% of Americans did not meet the requirement for **vitamin D**
- 88.5% didn't get enough **vitamin E**
- 52.2% needed more **magnesium**
- 44.1% didn't eat enough **calcium**
- 43.0% needed more **vitamin A** and
- 38.9% didn't get enough **vitamin C**

B vitamins, copper, iron, phosphorus, selenium and **zinc** were also in short supply.

If we don't obtain essential nutrients from our food, our bodies can't work properly → chronic health problems.

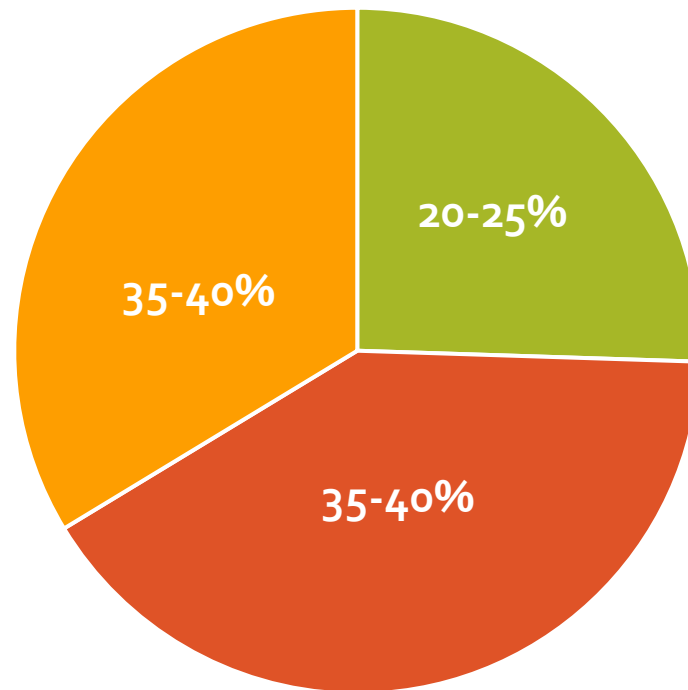
2. “Rule of Thirds”

At **every** meal or snack, eat some healthy **fat**, **carbohydrate** and **protein** (defined below)

Unrefined carbs:

Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes.

Non-essential; we can survive without carbs
(though some carbs are very healthy – see next slide)



High-quality protein: Fish, seafood, meat, egg whites, dairy, tofu, beans, seeds, nuts, protein powder. **Essential; without protein we die.**

Fats: Olive oil, olives, avocado, nuts, nut butter, nut oil, seeds, oily fish, dairy, egg yolks, meat (ideally grass-fed). **Essential; without fats we die.**

Nutritious carbs: Enjoy



In moderation:

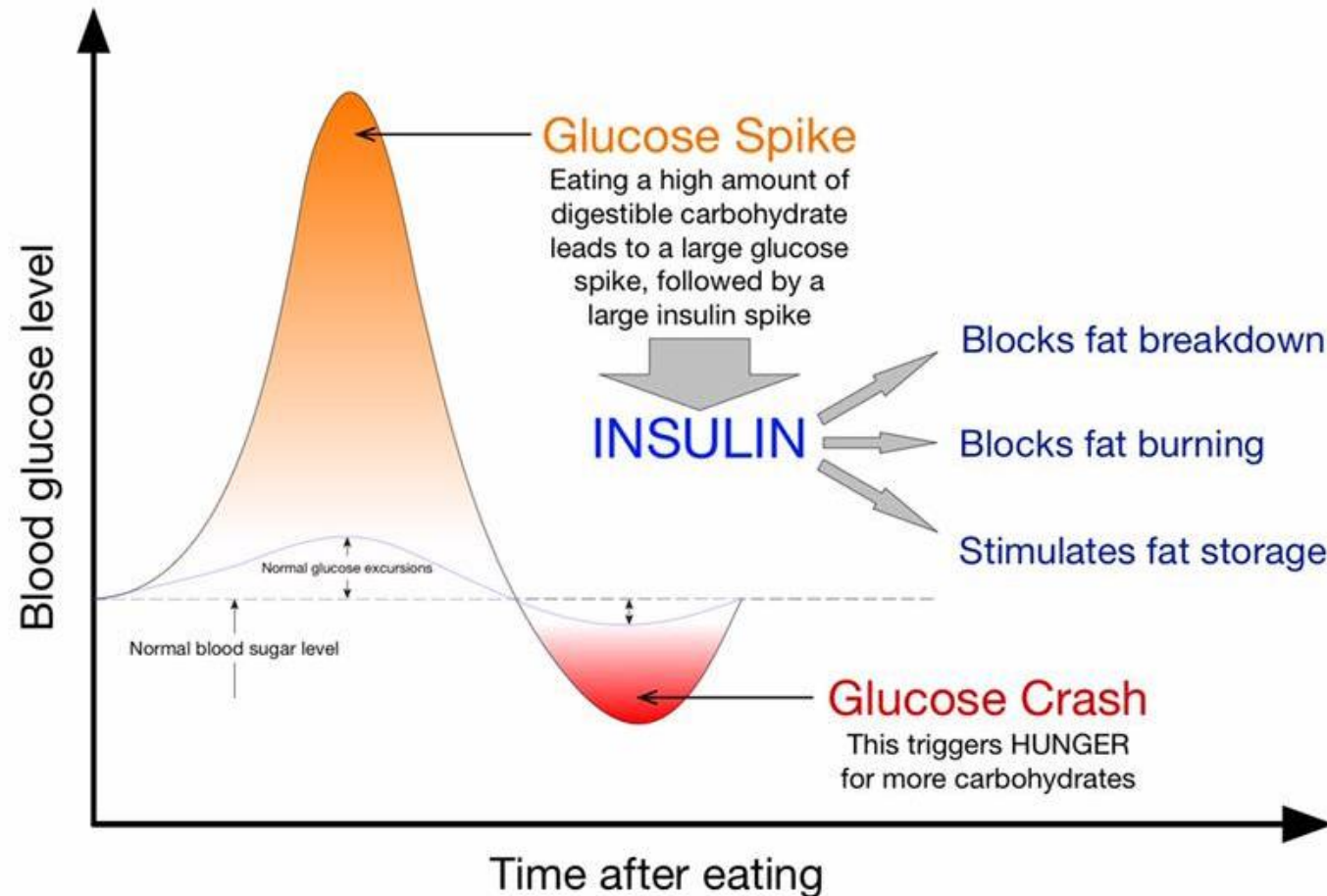


Empty carbs: Minimize



Conner Middelmann

Refined carbs → metabolic problems



Chronic fluctuations of blood glucose and insulin, are associated with an increased risk of:

- Prediabetes & type-2 diabetes
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased triglycerides
- Low HDL (“good”) cholesterol
- Weight gain (esp. around the belly – visceral fat)
- Gout, joint pain
- Weakened immune system
- Insulin resistance / Metabolic syndrome

Nutritious fats: Enjoy

Primarily (about 2/3 to 3/4 of fat intake):

- Olives & olive oil
- Avocados & avocado oil
- Nuts, nut butters & oils
- Seeds, seed butters (e.g., chia, flax, hemp, sunflower, pumpkin)
- Oily fish
- Omega-3 enriched/pastured eggs

To a lesser extent (1/3 to 1/4 of fat intake):

- Meat
- Dairy (milk, butter, yogurt, kefir, cheese)
- Coconut, coconut oil, MCT oil



Empty fats: Limit

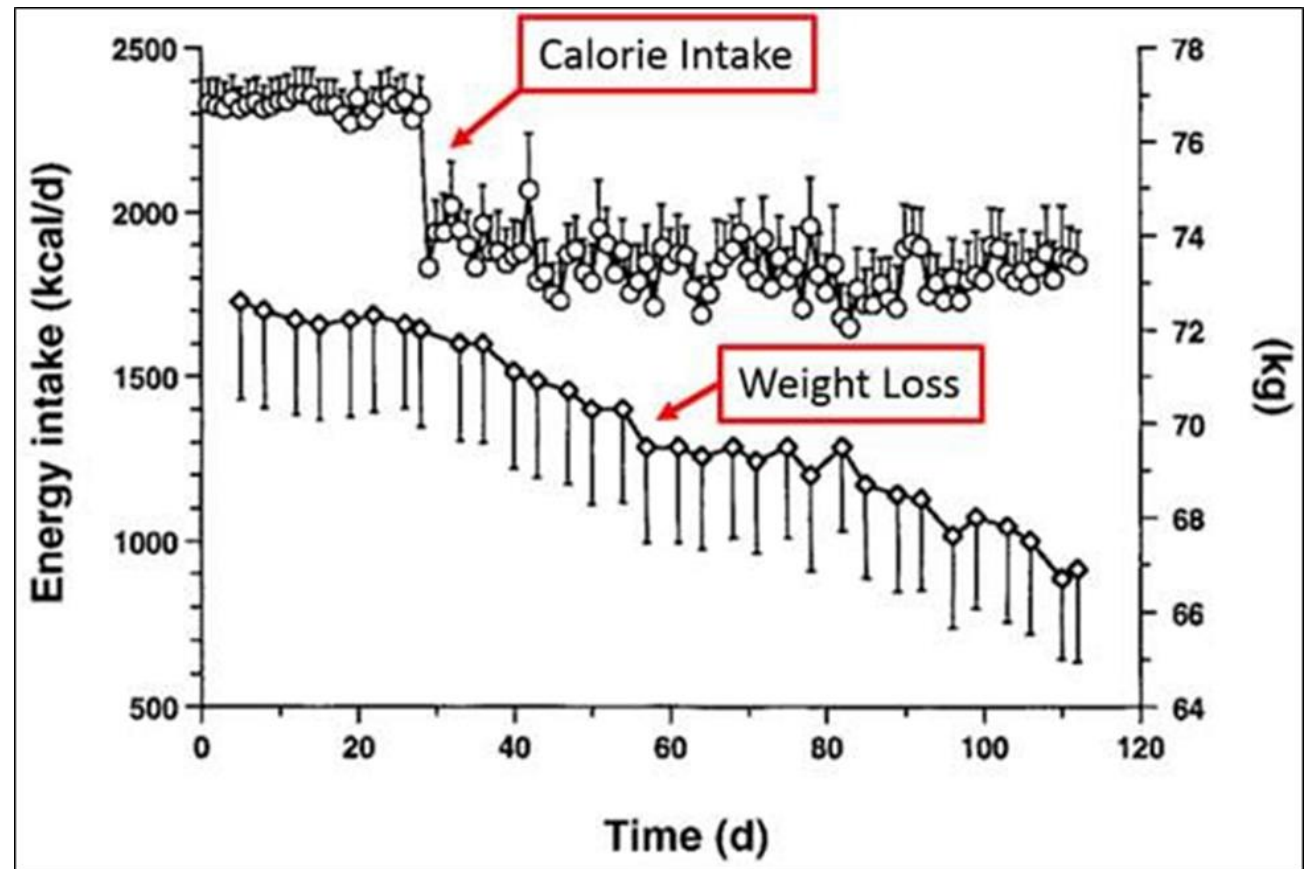
- Highly processed seed oils high in omega-6 fatty acids (for instance, soybean, corn, safflower, cottonseed, sunflower, grape seed, rice bran – known as “vegetable oils”)
- Margarines, spreads, salad dressings and mayonnaise made with these oils
- Fried foods, trans fats, vegetable shortening
- Fats heated beyond their smoke point
- Rancid fats (incl. fish oil supplements past their “best-by” date)
- Saturated fat from intensively reared animals



c. Protein (from "protos" in Greek = "the most important")

Without protein, **life is impossible**. Proteins are needed to make **muscles, tendons, organs and skin, enzymes, hormones, neurotransmitters and antibodies**.

Protein plays a key role in **satiety and blood sugar control**. For this reason, it can help people who are trying to lose weight (see graph) and balance blood glucose.



Protein practicalities

Proteins are made from building blocks called **amino acids**. Some of these can be made by our bodies but we must get others (“essential amino acids”) from our food.

- **Animal foods** (e.g., meat, fish, eggs, dairy) provide *all* nine essential amino acids in the right amounts for us to make full use of them (this is called “complete” protein).
- **Plant foods** (e.g., beans, grains, nuts, tofu, etc.) contain less protein than animal foods. Moreover, they don’t provide all the essential amino acids and need to be combined to yield “complete” protein (e.g. beans & rice).

Each individual’s **protein requirement** varies ([calculate yours here](#)). As a rule of thumb, adults should aim for **25-35 grams protein** (from plants *and* animals) **per meal**.

Minimally processed protein: Enjoy



Highly processed protein: Limit



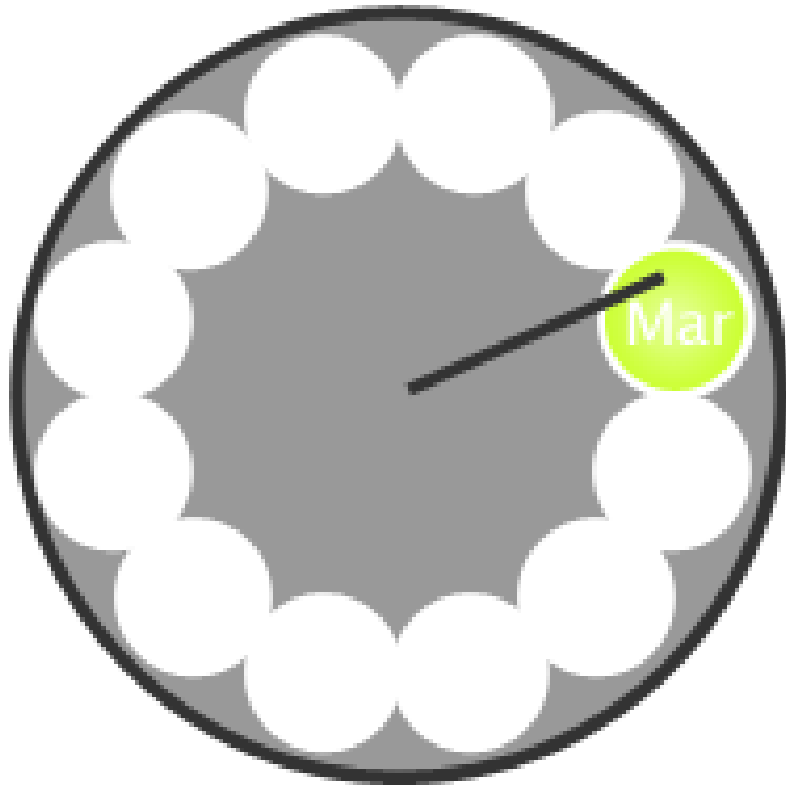
3. Eat lots of *different* whole foods (variety)



Dietary variety...

- Most closely mirrors the **ancestral environment** in which we evolved
- Provides a **broader range of nutrients** than eating the same 4-5 foods
- Reduces **over-exposure** to potentially harmful compounds (e.g., arsenic in kale or rice; oxalates in spinach (kidney stones); etc.)
- Supports **healthy gut flora** (which is essential to overall health)
- **30% lower mortality** rate in people who eat lots of different healthy foods vs. those who eat the same healthy foods regularly

Dietary variety strategy 1: Eat the seasons

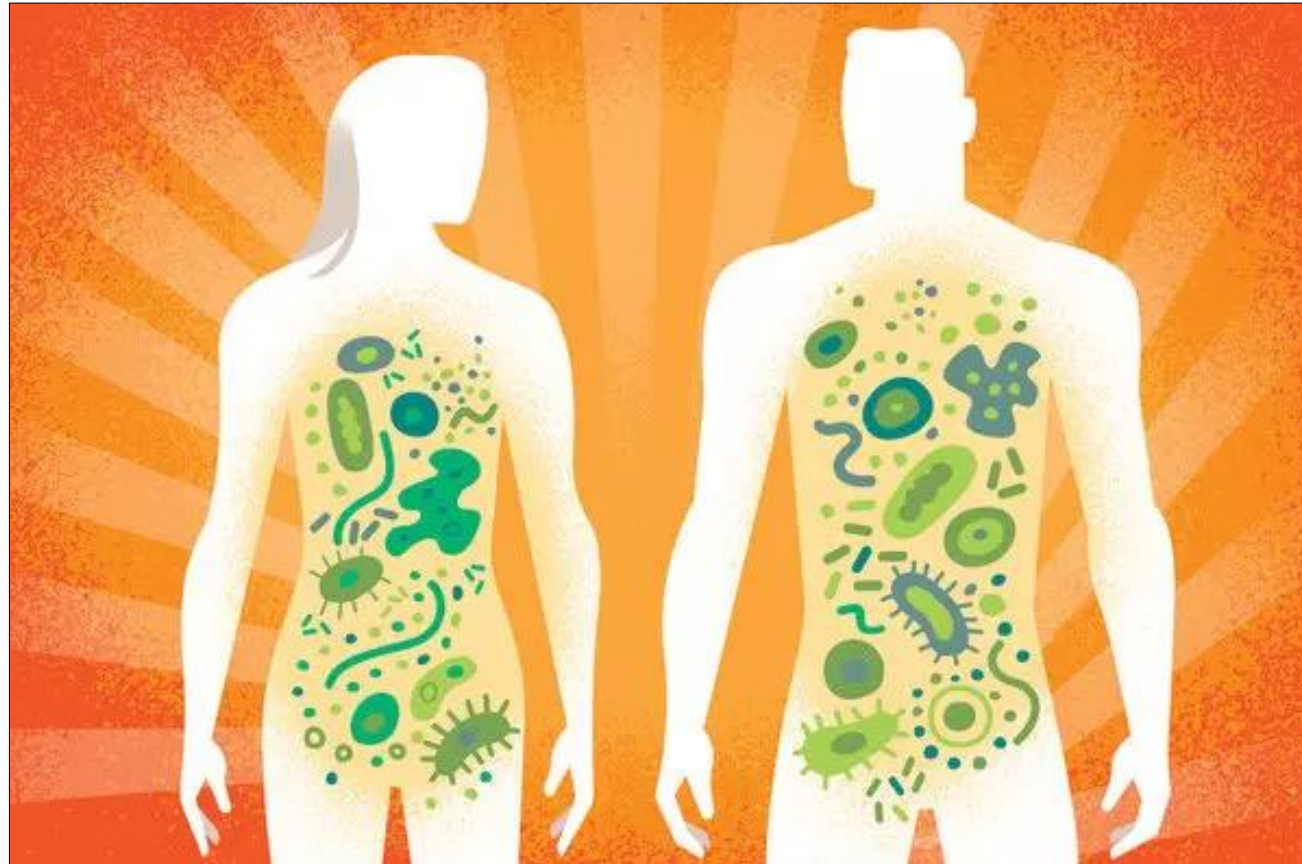


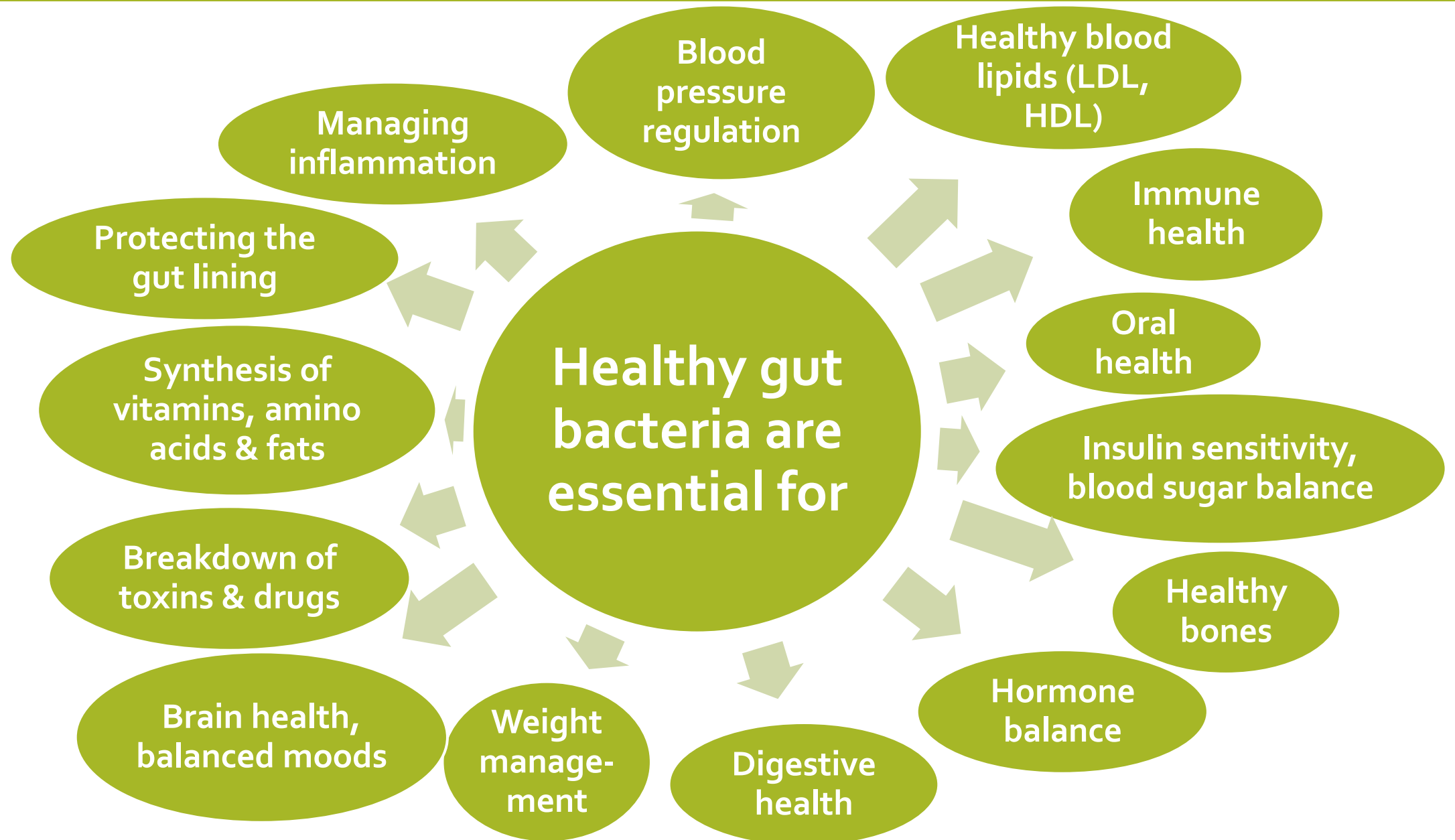
In season in March

- **Seasonal vegetables:** Broccoli, broccolini, celery root, fennel, kale, leeks, mache, potatoes (maincrop), rutabaga, salsify, sunchoke, turnips.
- **Seasonal fruits:** Oranges, blood oranges, grapefruit, kiwi fruit, oranges, pineapple.
- **Seasonal meat & seafood:** clams, crab, mussels

www.eattheseasons.com

4. Healthy gut bacteria (*a.k.a. microbiome*)





Probiotic foods: Consume at every meal

These foods contain healthy bacteria. [Click on links to see products I like.](#)

- [Kefir](#) made with [cow's milk](#), [cashew milk](#), [lactose-free cow's milk](#) or [goat's milk](#). (*Grass-fed/organic, unsweetened & unflavored.*)
- Yogurt: [Greek](#), [regular](#), [cashew](#), [coconut](#), [soy](#). (*Grass-fed/organic, unsweetened & unflavored.*)
- [Cottage cheese](#)
- Fresh goat cheese
- [Sour cream](#)
- [Skyr](#) (*low-sugar Icelandic yogurt*)
- [Miso](#) paste
- [Kombucha](#)
- [Water kefir](#)
- [Raw, fermented sauerkraut](#), [kimchi](#), [dill pickles](#) (*no vinegar*)
- [Gut shots](#) and [Inner Eco](#) liquid supplements

Prebiotic foods: Consume at every meal

These foods nourish your healthy bacteria; they are essential to health

- Green leafy vegetables
- Garlic, leeks, onions
- Legumes, beans and peas
- Seeds (e.g., flax, chia)
- Nuts (raw, unsalted)
- Oats, barley (whole)
- Potatoes (cooked & chilled)
- Uncle Ben's parboiled rice
- Apples
- Bananas
- Berries
- Asparagus
- Raw jicama
- Cocoa (unsweetened), coffee
- Seaweed
- Foods high in polyphenols (see [list](#))

5. Prepare your own meals



Health benefits of home cooking

- **Healthier ingredients:** Less sugar, refined carbs & salt, and more vitamins, minerals, protein, healthy fats than restaurant meals.
- **Better portion control:** Restaurant meals often contain 50% more calories than the average person needs.
- **Saves money.** See [this](#) and read [this](#).
- **Saves time.** Yes, really. 😊 If you plan your meals and make simple dishes, it takes as much time to cook a meal as it does to eat out, research has found.
- **Psychological benefits:** Cooking helps you switch off, fosters creativity & community. Research has found major benefits of home cooking and family meals in children and teens.

6: You Only Live Once (80:20 Rule)



If you eat this way most of the time, it's OK to eat a slice of birthday cake or pizza occasionally, *without guilt*. Enjoy these moments as the rare treats they are becoming!

And remember: All good things take time



Research has found that it takes people *on average* 66 days to sustainably adopt a new habit.

This isn't a race or a competition. There's no deadline and no one will judge you.

So take the time you need to make healthy changes.

One step at a time.

Over to you!

For one week, **track everything you eat & drink** to see how “Mediterranean” your diet is. For instance,

- How much “**real food**” (minimally processed) are you eating?
- Do you eat **protein, healthy fats & unrefined carbs** at every meal?
- How **diverse** is your diet?
- Are you preparing **meals from scratch**?
- Are you eating **probiotic & prebiotic** foods?
- How are you doing in terms of the **80:20 rule**?

If you tick all these boxes, GREAT! If not, pick ONE and start working on it. Don’t try to change everything at once or you’ll burn out.

If you want support in “Mediterraneanizing” your diet, please watch the other videos in this series, including my cooking classes, or join one of my group coaching programs.

Any Questions?

Conner Middelman, B.S., DiplON

Nutritionist at Modern Mediterranean, LLC

- Website: www.modernmediterranean.com
- Email: connermid@gmail.com
- Follow me on Instagram: www.instagram.com/modernmediterranean
- My recipe blog: www.recipes-for-disaster.com
- My [YouTube cooking channel](#)