Mediterranean Diet Cheat Sheet

This cheat sheet offers simple guidance on how to cook Mediterranean-style meals while focusing on brain health, using healthy oils, building flavour, and making cooking easier.

Building a Mediterranean Meal

Creating a balanced Mediterranean meal is easy when you follow this structure:

- **Base:** Start with a generous portion of vegetables (leafy greens, tomatoes, peppers, courgette).
- **Protein:** Add lean proteins like fish, chicken, turkey, legumes (chickpeas, lentils), or eggs.
- **Healthy Grains:** Choose whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, bulgur, or whole grain pasta and bread.
- **Healthy Fats:** Drizzle extra virgin olive oil or add olives and avocado for heart-healthy fats.
- **Flavour Boosters:** Use fresh herbs (basil, parsley, oregano) and spices (garlic, cumin, paprika) for rich, satisfying flavours.

Healthy Fats

In Mediterranean cooking, healthy oils are essential. Here's what to use and how:

- **Extra Virgin Olive Oil:** Use this as your primary oil for cooking, drizzling on salads, and finishing dishes. It's rich in antioxidants and healthy fats that support brain health.
- **Rapeseed Oil:** A great alternative for high-heat cooking (e.g. roasting, sautéing) with a mild flavour and beneficial fats.
- **Olives:** Whole olives are not only a tasty addition but also a great source of healthy fats.

Tip: Avoid processed oils like sunflower oil, corn oil, or margarine.



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Top Brain-Boosting Foods

Include these Mediterranean staples that are known to support brain function:

- **Oily Fish:** Salmon, mackerel and sardines provide omega-3 fatty acids, which are vital for brain health.
- **Leafy Greens:** Spinach, kale, and rocket are packed with antioxidants and vitamins like folate, which support cognitive function.
- **Nuts & Seeds:** Walnuts, almonds, chia seeds, and flaxseeds are excellent sources of brain-healthy fats and fibre.
- **Berries:** Blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries are rich in antioxidants that help reduce oxidative stress on the brain.

Focus on Building Flavour

Building flavour is key to Mediterranean meals. Use these tips to make your dishes delicious:

- **Herbs:** Fresh herbs like oregano, thyme, basil, parsley, and dill not only add flavour but also contain powerful antioxidants.
- **Citrus:** A squeeze of lemon or lime adds brightness and balances the richness of olive oil and fatty fish.
- **Garlic & Onion:** These add depth to your dishes and are staples in Mediterranean cooking.
- **Spices:** Use paprika, cumin, coriander, and red pepper flakes to layer your meals with bold, warm flavours.
- **Vinegars:** Balsamic, red wine, and apple cider vinegar provide acidity that enhances flavour without added salt.



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Make cooking easier

Here are a few tips to make cooking simpler and less tiring, especially when experiencing Parkinson's symptoms:

- **Pre-Prep Ingredients:** Buy pre-chopped vegetables, frozen veggies, or prepare ingredients in bulk when you have the energy.
- **One-Pan or One-Pot Meals:** Focus on recipes like roasted vegetables with fish, or hearty stews that minimise clean-up and cooking steps.
- **Use Kitchen Gadgets:** Slow cookers, food processors, and hand blenders can save time and effort, reducing physical strain.
- **Batch Cook & Freeze:** Prepare larger portions of meals when you feel good and freeze them for easy reheating on busier or more challenging days.
- **Cook While Sitting:** Set up a comfortable chair at your counter or kitchen table so you can chop and prepare meals while seated.

Hydration & Beverages

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated.
- Enjoy herbal teas, green tea, or black coffee in moderation for an antioxidant boost.
- If desired, a small glass of red wine with dinner can be part of the Mediterranean diet (but you may wish to consult your healthcare provider first).

By focusing on these key principles—building balanced meals, using healthy oils, incorporating brain-supportive foods, and simplifying the cooking process—you can enjoy delicious, nourishing Mediterranean meals while managing Parkinson's more easily.

