



**Ask the Expert**

*Arizona Republic*

**Q. I am trying to loose weight and I heard about the Mediterranean diet. Can you tell me more about this diet?**

**A.** Observational studies conducted in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century associated the Mediterranean diet with longer life spans, reduced rates of chronic disease, such as cardiovascular disease and dementia, and fewer cancers of the colon, breast, prostate, and uterus. Cardiovascular disease includes heart attacks, strokes and high blood pressure.

The word *diet* is not to be confused with a weight-loss program, but the usual food and drink of a person. Twenty-one countries have a coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, and additional countries are in the Mediterranean region. Characteristics of the traditional, healthy Mediterranean diet include the following:

- Maximization of natural whole foods while minimizing highly processed foods
- Small amounts of red meat
- Less than four eggs per week
- Low to moderate amounts of poultry and fish
- Daily fresh fruit
- Seasonal locally grown foods with minimal processing
- Concentrated sugars only a few times per week
- Consumption of wine in low to moderate amounts, and usually during a meal
- Milk products, such as cheese and yogurt, in low to moderate amounts
- Olive oil as the predominant fat
- Abundance of foods from plants, including vegetables, fruits, beans, potatoes, nuts, seeds, breads and other whole grain products
- Naturally low in saturated fat, trans fats, and cholesterol
- Naturally high in fiber, phytonutrients, vitamins, antioxidants, and minerals, especially when compared with concentrated, refined starches and sugars in a modern Western diet
- Naturally high in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, particularly as a replacement for saturated fats

Be aware that the documented health benefits of the Mediterranean diet may be related to a physically active lifestyle and other social and cultural issues. For example, traditional Mediterranean mealtimes were leisurely family affairs, not a fast food meal eaten off your lap on your drive home from work.



## Catholic Healthcare West



*Steve Parker, M.D., is a board certified physician with privileges at Chandler Regional Medical Center and Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. They are a part of the Catholic Healthcare West (CHW) system in Arizona, which includes, St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center and Barrow Neurological Institute, CHW Urgent Care in Ahwatukee, Gilbert and Queen Creek, the Sun Lakes Laboratory, Warner Outpatient Surgery and the Arizona Orthopedic Surgical Hospital. For a physician referral, please call the ResourceLink toll-free at 1.877.728.5414.*