

A TASTE OF ITALY IN AMERICA

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Eat, Stay Fit,
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Trumpeter Chris Botti



Go Mediterranean:

Lose weight,
Eat well,
Stay healthy



by Laura Pensiero

LIKE CLOCKWORK, DESPITE THE BEST MADE PLANS and resolutions, here I am carrying the extra five pounds I inevitably notice every January. It starts with the arrival of crisp, cool autumn air and the utter joy I take in turning on the stove to start braising and roasting. I love the aromas that perfume the house and the complex layering of flavors that starkly contrast with the simply prepared fresh foods of summer. I'm also *hungrier!*

As we move into the holiday season that little extra, both in portion sizes and heartiness of meals, reaches its climax, and temptations lurk around every corner; delicious little bites of rich foods that are not part of the usual routine—fois gras, crispy

hors d'oeuvres, the unparalleled Italian cotechino with lentils, cheeses of all nationalities, pumpkin pie, mousses, cookies, tortes, paneforte, panettone, and creamy egnog mark the season and must be tasted.

These pounds crept on slowly, and so they will go. And they *must* go since not attending to this seasonal dilemma would, after a few years, put me in the “overweight” classification that includes more than 50% of Americans. **Just as I do every other year, I will buckle down but not starve or deprive myself. I have a most pleasing strategy in mind...I am heading back to the Mediterranean.**

I confess that I have an advantage in the belt tightening area: I am a registered dietitian, trained chef and the owner of a restaurant, *Gigi Trattoria*, chock full of delicious, *innately* healthy Mediterranean offerings—these dishes, which are rooted in tradition, do not need tweaking to get healthy. The how-tos of eating well, and perhaps taking off a few pounds, are a benefit of my studies and training; the implementation is almost completely related to the fact that **a Mediterranean-style diet is among the most flavorful, relaxed and pleasant ways to eat healthy.**

Evolving to a Mediterranean eating plan involves small and gradual changes, ones that actually increase the enjoyment of eating and lead to lifelong improvements in eating habits, sustainable weight reduction, better health and longevity. As for the science to back up my personal testimonials? The Mediterranean “diet” has been the focus of numerous studies over the last half a century, as scientists seek to explain why people from this region enjoy (and the key word is *enjoy*) longer and healthier lives. I have used the word “diet” to describe this *style* of eating, but it is not at all similar to the high profit (and low success) packaged weight loss plans that we are most familiar with.

Those longtime champions of a Mediterranean diet—rich in vegetables, fruits, beans, fish, nuts and olive oil, washed down with a glass or two of wine each day—have recently gained further validation. Two recent studies published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, have demonstrated that this style of eating, combined

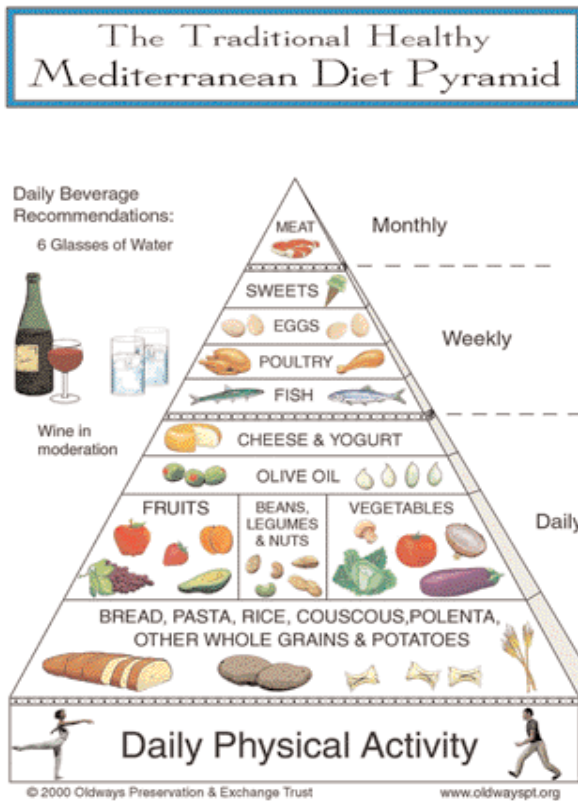
with regular physical activity, can help prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. It can also prolong life. Those who followed a Mediterranean style diet, did not smoke, drank moderately and were physically active. They were about half as likely to die during the two-year study period. A second study compared people, again, living a Mediterranean lifestyle (diet, exercise, moderate alcohol and no smoking), to those following a low-fat diet. Those enjoying the benefits of *la dolce vita* (olive oil, nuts and a glass or two of wine per day) also profited with their health—losing more weight, lowering their blood pressure, insulin, glucose and “bad” cholesterol levels and increasing their good cholesterol levels—significantly more than the (likely) flavor and satiety suffering low-fat group.

For a quick visual grasp of

what the Mediterranean group was eating, check out the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid developed by Oldways, an organization that promotes healthy eating, sustainable food choices, and traditional food ways. The pyramid is based on the dietary traditions of Crete, much of the rest of Greece and southern Italy circa 1960, where the first studies of the health benefits of this eating plan and lifestyle were conducted. The pyramid was created in collaboration with the world’s most prominent nutrition scientists and, although based on early studies, integrates current nutrition research.

So how do you go Mediterranean? First of all, get the concept of dieting out of your head, and understand that changing your eating habits, preferences, cooking and dining out strategies is a process. You didn’t get to





where you are in one day, and going for broke will likely lead to a sense of failure, probably sooner rather than later. And, remember, it is not just about diet, so try to implement one or two of the following Mediterranean-like diet *and* lifestyle suggestions per week:

1 Add more plant foods to your diet, including fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes. Include, but limit portion sizes of refined grains such as most breads, white rices, and pasta as well as potatoes.

2 Select a variety of minimally processed foods.

3 Use olive oil as the primary fat, replacing other fats and oil, in your diet. *Olive oil can be used in some baked goods such as carrot, chocolate, spice and fruit cakes; cookie bars; brownies; graham cracker, nut, or cookie crusts; corn bread or*

sticks and other quick breads, muffins, and biscuits.

4 Try to keep your total fat intake to less than 35% of calories (this is generous) and focus on “healthy” fats such as olive oil and those found in nuts, seeds and fish.

5 Select moderate amounts of dairy, particularly yogurt (low-fat and nonfat versions may be preferable) and low-moderate amounts of cheese.

6 Focus on moderate portion sizes of fish, poultry and eggs (4 or less per week) as primary animal protein sources.

7 Limit red meat consumption to a couple of times a month and keep total intake to 12 to 16 ounces. Select leaner cuts and use cooking methods that tenderize.

8 Engage in regular physical activity, as diet alone won’t afford you all of the health benefits, nor the svelte figure.

9 Enjoy moderate amounts of

wine, normally with meals; about one to two glasses per day for men and one glass per day for women (wine is optional and should be avoided when consumption puts the individual or others at risk.)

10 Eat slowly, savor, enjoy....

11 Reduce portion sizes—a smaller plate diameter helps you adjust to this.

12 Try not to eat when you’re hurried and limit between meal snacks. Look at snacking as an opportunity to gain nutrients (i.e. calcium in yogurt, a fruit or vegetable serving, more fiber, etc.)

13 Tune in to why you are eating; are you really hungry?

Lastly, keep in mind practicality. At *Gigi Trattoria* in Rhinebeck, NY, we use Hudson Valley ingredients to recreate classic Mediterranean dishes. The result is the freshness and nutrient concentration of locality combined with tried and true tradition. The process does not need to remain classic, you can take what is fresh and flavorful and use some creativity to prepare dishes that are *based* on Mediterranean diet principles. Without question, for long-term success, the whole plan has to work for both your lifestyle and geography.

To get started I recommend the following reading:

any Mediterranean cookbook authored by Paul Wolfert; Nancy Harmon-Jenkin’s *Mediterranean Diet Cookbook*; and Clifford Wright’s *Mediterranean Feast*. They will show you the path to a delicious, healthful, no sacrifice, Mediterranean eating plan.

Here are a couple of “Hudson Valley Mediterranean” *Gigi Trattoria* recipes to get you (and me) started:

Using olive oil in baked goods often allows for use of less fat. Here are some conversions for recipes:

BUTTER/MARGARINE	OLIVE OIL
1 teaspoon	3/4 teaspoon
1 tablespoon	2 1/4 teaspoons
2 tablespoons	1 1/2 tablespoons
1/4 cup	2 tablespoons
1/3 cup	1/4 cup
1/2 cup	1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoon
2/3 cup	1/2 cup
3/4 cup	1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon
1 cup	3/4 cup

Fiaschetto

Giant White Beans with Herbs

Gigi customers often request the recipe for *Fiaschetto*, which is easy to prepare at home. Serve it as a side dish in terra cotta crocks, as we do at Gigi, or mix the beans into pasta dishes or soups.

Makes 8 servings

1 pound dried "gigandes" or Italian Corona beans*
 2 celery stalks, halved
 1 carrot, halved
 1 medium onion, halved
 2-3 cloves garlic, peeled
 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 *You can substitute large lima beans.

Place the beans in a bowl and cover by at least 2 inches with cold water. Soak 12 to 14 hours. Drain. Place the beans in a heavy-bottomed pot and cover by 4 inches with water. Add the celery, carrot, onion, garlic, and bay leaf and bring to boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until the beans are tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Allow the beans to cool in their cooking liquid. Drain, reserving the cooking liquid.

When ready to serve, heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the rosemary and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the beans along with a few generous spoonfuls of the cooking liquid. Cook, tossing or stirring, until soupy and heated through. Remove from the heat, add the Parmesan, and toss to combine. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper and serve.

Barbina

The Barbina is the most popular salad at *Gigi Trattoria*. Almost every ingredient is purchased locally and variations throughout the seasons include the omission of butternut squash and inclusion of asparagus, string and wax beans, and snow peas. The vegetables are always roasted to heighten their natural sweetness and concentrate flavors. The portion is generous, so it is often the "main entree" or split before a second course.

Makes 4 servings

Salad

4 medium beets (about 2 to 3 inches in diameter), preferably red and golden
 10 ounces mixed seasonal mushrooms
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper
 2 cups diced butternut squash
 8 cups (about 6 ounces) mixed baby greens, preferably organic
 4 ounces crumbled goat cheese, room temperature
 1/3 cup crushed toasted walnuts



Barbina



Fiaschetta

Sherry Shallot Vinaigrette

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
 1 tablespoon finely chopped shallot
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1/2 teaspoon fresh chopped thyme
 leaves
 cold water, as needed

Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Roast the beets, lining the bottom of a baking dish or cast iron pan with kosher salt (this will absorb any bleeding, which is particularly important if mixing red and yellow beets). Place the beets in the pan, cover tightly with foil and bake until tender when pierced, 45 to 60 minutes depending on the size of the beet. When cool enough to handle, peel the skins and slice into thin (approximately 1/8 inch) rounds. Reserve yellow and red beet slices separately.

Increase oven temperature to 450 degrees F. Using a moist kitchen or paper towel, wipe the mushrooms clean and remove tough portion of stem if present. Halve or quarter any large mushrooms, and place in one layer in a small roasting dish. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and toss to combine. Roast for 10 to 12 minutes, until juices are nearly evaporated and outside edges begin to brown. Remove pan from oven and turn mushrooms with a spatula; continue roasting until mushrooms are uniformly brown and all liquid has evaporated, 5 to 7 minutes longer. Set aside to cool.

While the mushrooms cook, place the butternut squash in a roasting pan just large enough to hold in 1 layer. Drizzle with remaining tablespoon of olive oil, season with salt, and toss to combine.

Roast until they can easily be pierced and are lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the vinaigrette: Place the first four ingredients in the work bowl of a food processor or blender. Process until smooth; if necessary add a little bit of water and process again to thin to desired consistency. Transfer to a small bowl, season with salt and pepper, and stir in the thyme. Use immediately or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Assemble the salad placing a circle of slightly overlapping beets on the bottom of each serving plate; leave a 2-inch margin along the outside edge. Place the baby greens, mushrooms, and butternut squash in a large mixing bowl, add the vinaigrette, and toss to combine. Place a neat mound of the salad in the center of the beets. Scatter Coach Farm goat cheese over the salads and sprinkle with toasted walnuts. Serve immediately.

Editor's Note: Celebrated globally since 1998, the United States hosted **World Pasta Day** for the first time in October, 2004. The Italian Trade Commission and UNIFI (the Italian Pasta Association), with the support of Buonitalia (a New York-based importer of Italian food), sponsored the World Pasta Day festivities, including a Scientific and Culinary Colloquium that, in part, addressed the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet. The event was organized by Oldways Preservation Trust, a leading food issues think tank in Boston, MA. For more information on Oldways, visit www.oldwayspt.org

The Strang Cancer Prevention Center Cookbook contains the latest information from the leading cancer prevention experts and top gourmet chefs about the crucial link between diet and health. To order on-line visit: www.gigitrattoria.com/books.html

