

## The Mediterranean Diet: A Smart Choice for Seniors

Submitted by Standish Village

With so many fad diets circulating in pop culture right now, it's hard to know which one is the best across a range of ages, body types, and lifestyles.

The Mediterranean diet was recently named the “#1 Best Diet” by U.S. News & World Report, and since its inception in the mid-1900s, the diet has continuously had scientifically proven benefits to cognitive and cardiovascular health at any age.

Popularized in the 1990s by Harvard University's School of Public Health, the Mediterranean diet was originally meant to reflect eating habits of countries around the Mediterranean Sea and features healthful ingredients like olive oil, nuts, fruits and vegetables, fish, and whole grains.

The Mediterranean diet's extensive health benefits and convenience make it perfect for seniors. Following the diet's food guidelines, especially when combined with regular physical and social activity, mitigates risk factors for cardiovascular diseases and makes a condition less severe if it appears.

The diet has also been shown to slow cognitive decline; how many popular diets can claim that outcome? The diet's accompanying lifestyle elements, which include both physical activity and eating socially, also work to enhance a senior's quality of life.

As a population vulnerable to loneliness, isolation, and depression, it is vital that seniors remain active and social.

As an added bonus, these activities also help reduce the risk and can delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

It can be hard for a senior living alone to cook nutritious meals for just himself or herself and equally challenging, especially during long winter months, to find quality opportunities for social interaction and activity.

These are prime reasons why transitioning to assisted living can be a beneficial and brain-boosting decision, especially if the assisted living community, like Standish Village, happens to offer Mediterranean-style menu options.

With a wide range of social opportunities, assisted living helps seniors fill their days with group exercise, meals with friends, and enriching activities like trivia and art, all mainstays of the Mediterranean diet. Research has shown that seniors thrive in communities that offer engaging and stimulating activities and services.

While the Mediterranean diet can be a great option for seniors, Standish Village's Brain Healthy Cooking Program tweaks the diet to better benefit New England seniors, with modifications such as meals featuring locally abundant vegetables, low-fat dairy options for heart health, and whole grain breads made from white whole wheat to best resemble what seniors are accustomed to eating.

Changes like these make the diet more accessible to seniors and more appealing. Seniors and their families can find sample recipes from this program, along with Brain Healthy tips, at [AgeRight.org](http://AgeRight.org).

