The Atlantic diet: Benefits, food list and recipes

This is the more approachable cousin of the Mediterranean meal plan, famed for including dairy, pork and potatoes

Laurel Ives

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The Atlantic diet focuses on the traditional cuisine of Northern Portugal and Galicia | CREDIT: Getty

The Atlantic diet made headlines around the world when a new study showed that people following the diet lost several inches around their waistline.

The study, published in the journal *JAMA Network Open*, demonstrated that the group who followed the diet reduced their risk of metabolic syndrome by a third in just six months.

Metabolic syndrome is made up of five key health risks including high blood sugar, high blood pressure and a large waistline. Untreated it can lead to diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Experts rushed to explain the new diet on the block, but fundamentally the Atlantic diet is best understood as a cousin of the much-studied and much-lauded Mediterranean diet. It shares many of the key elements, with some notable differences too. Read on for everything you need to know. Or skip straight to the five-day Atlantic diet plan and recipes

What is the Atlantic diet?

Although the name suggests that the diet covers a vast oceanic area, the Atlantic diet is focused on quite a specific region: the traditional cuisine of Northern Portugal and Galicia, a region in north-west Spain.

Like the Mediterranean diet, the Atlantic diet emphasises:

- Fresh seasonal vegetables
- Three or four portions of fish a week
- Communal eating and traditional cooking methods
- Starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes
- Red meat including pork and beef
- Cod, dairy and brassica vegetables such as broccoli

“The Atlantic Diet focuses on seafood, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats, mirroring the most studied diet in the world, the Mediterranean diet, but with a focus on brassica vegetables like kale and cabbage and other starchy carbs like potato and bread too, “ says Nichola Ludlam-Raine, a dietitian and the author of forthcoming book *How Not To Eat Ultra-Processed*.

With the focus on cod, potatoes and broccoli, the ingredients will feel familiar to many in Britain.

“It resembles a UK diet, or at least foods that can be produced far more readily in the UK than some of the Mediterranean diet foods,” says Richard Hoffman, an associate lecturer in nutrition at the University of Hertfordshire.

Including potatoes, pork and dairy may come as a surprise to some people, as these foods are not generally considered healthy. But the key difference is how they are cooked and eaten. Whereas in the UK pork is often consumed as bacon or a grilled pork chop, in the Atlantic diet it is more likely to be cooked in a stew.

"People forget that the main carcinogens in red meat are produced during the cooking process when it's been grilled, fried or barbecued at high temperatures and these are linked to cancer and Type 2 diabetes," notes Hoffman. "But in a stew, you might brown the meat a little, but then you cook it with olive oil, onions, rosemary and garlic which are all antioxidants and these inhibit the inflammatory markers."

Similarly, potatoes are often consumed in vegetable soups or baked with their skins, rather than served as chips or mash, which reduces their impact on our blood sugar. "When you eat a vegetable soup you're consuming all the nutrients as well, whereas the old fashioned way of cooking vegetables in the UK where you boil them and throw away the water means that all the nutrients are being thrown away as well."

Dairy is often made from sheep and goat's milk which can be easier to digest and many varieties of cheese and yogurt contain bacteria which benefit our gut health.

"We can tend to demonise foods like dairy, red meat and potatoes, but we're not talking about Mcdonald's Flurries here," says Dominique Ludwig, a nutritionist. "The yogurt is fermented and has live probiotics, pork is a great source of protein and zinc, and potatoes are a lovely natural unprocessed food with fibre in their skins and potassium and vitamin C.

"Carbs are not the enemy, we just need to eat them in proportion, they should be around a quarter of your plate."

Health benefits of the Atlantic diet

The Atlantic Diet has multiple health benefits including:

- Weight management
- Cardiovascular health
- Brain health
- Reducing cancer risk
- Reducing the risk of Type 2 diabetes

"The Atlantic Diet is rich in nutrients that are essential for maintaining good health and preventing chronic diseases. The high intake of omega-3 fatty acids from oily fish contributes to cardiovascular health, reducing inflammation, and supporting brain function too," says the dietitian Nichola Ludlam-Raine.

The diet's reliance on whole grains, fruits, and vegetables ensures a high fibre intake, promoting digestive health and potentially reducing the risk of obesity and Type 2 diabetes, in addition to vitamins, minerals and antioxidants too.

"Olive oil, a primary fat source in the diet, is rich in monounsaturated fats and antioxidants, supporting heart health and potentially reducing cancer risk too. A diet like the Atlantic diet, which is low in ultra-processed foods and sugars, and high in whole foods, antioxidants, and healthy fats, can significantly impact longevity too," says Ludlam-Raine.

The focus on brassica vegetables is also beneficial for eye health.

"Kale is rich in an anti-oxidant that's been linked to reducing the risk of macular degeneration. Dark green vegetables are also rich in glucosinolates – organic compounds that have been shown to help prevent certain kinds of cancers and other illnesses," says Hoffman.

The Atlantic diet can also aid weight management and weight loss, partly because it's a natural high-fibre diet that is very satiating, and also because it doesn't include processed foods which lead to cravings and overeating. An active lifestyle and communal eating also contribute to the health benefits.

"If you're sitting around a table eating and talking with family and friends you take more time over your food and give yourself time for the satiety mechanisms to take hold after 20 mins or so. If you're mindlessly eating in front of a computer you can quickly eat too much without realising it," explains Hoffman.

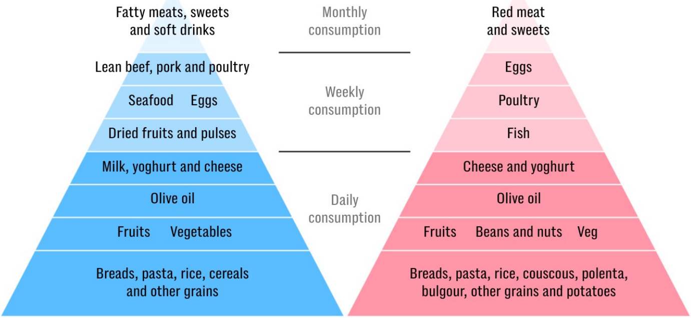
Atlantic diet versus the Mediterranean diet

The two diets are very much part of the same family. They both major on heart-friendly olive oil as the main source of good fat, local and seasonal vegetables and fruit, a high consumption of seafood and an active lifestyle coupled with communal eating.

However with the Mediterranean diet, food is more likely to be grilled or fried whereas there is a lot of steaming and stewing in Atlantic gastronomy. There are also fewer starchy carbohydrates like potatoes and less red meat in the Med diet.

How the Atlantic and Mediterranean diets compare

Atlantic diet
Mediterranean diet



Med diet vegetables are focused on southern European varieties like aubergines, peppers and courgettes. The Atlantic diet contains more potatoes, bread, brassica vegetables and dairy, and more red meat like pork and beef.

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Expert opinions on the Atlantic diet

Many experts are in favour of the Atlantic diet, largely because of its similarities to the much-researched Med diet and the fact that it's based on whole, natural foods.

"It's a healthy diet and – most importantly – it doesn't include ultra-processed foods," says Hoffman.

Other experts point out that the inclusion of a greater proportion of starchy carbs can make the diet easier to stick to over the long term.

"The Atlantic Diet's approach to including starchy carbohydrates, red meat, and wine in moderation is a refreshing way of life in comparison to more restrictive diets. This inclusivity can make the diet more enjoyable and sustainable over the long term," says Ludlam-Raine.

For Ludwig, the Med diet would be the preferred choice. “You can’t go wrong with the Med diet as it’s tried and tested and there is so much research behind it. I like that it includes more beans, lentils and leaner meats like chicken, but in general, the Atlantic diet is also good, provided you follow it consistently. There are no shortcuts to being healthy,” she says.

Five-day Atlantic diet plan and recipes

By Dominique Ludwig

Meal plan

Monday

Breakfast: Greek yogurt with walnuts, figs, pomegranate and honey

Lunch: Tuna nicoise salad

Dinner: Grilled sea bass with potatoes and seasonal vegetables

Tuesday

Breakfast: Omelette with spinach and feta cheese

Lunch: Mackerel and orange salad

Dinner: Sardine and butterbean puttanesca

Wednesday

Breakfast: Jewelled granola made with olive oil, fresh orange and natural yogurt

Lunch: Grilled sardines with fresh herbs and lemon

Dinner: Feijoada (black beans stew)

Thursday

Breakfast: Smashed sardines with capers and tomato

Lunch: Tomato and butterbean soup with pesto

Dinner: Vegetarian moussaka

Friday

Breakfast: Traditional bread with garlic, with green pesto, mozzarella, avocado, and tomato slices

Lunch: Pesto beans with green and white beans

Dinner: Seafood paella

Tuna Niçoise

Serves: 4

Ingredients

- 400g new potatoes, cooked
- 4 boiled eggs, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons capers
- ½ red onion, finely sliced
- 4 chopped tomatoes
- 100g cooked and cooled green beans
- 2 tins of yellowfin tuna steak in olive oil
- 1 pack salad leaves
- Handful of green olives

Dressing:

- 50ml olive oil
- 50ml red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper

Method

1. Tip the salad ingredients into a bowl, ensuring they're well mixed.
2. Whisk together the olive oil, vinegar and mustard, then season. Dress liberally over the salad and serve immediately.

Omelette with spinach and feta cheese

Serves: 1

Ingredients

- 2 eggs
- 100g Greek yogurt
- Salt and pepper
- Chopped herbs; eg chives and parsley
- 15 ml extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 red onion, finely sliced
- 1 red pepper, finely sliced
- 50g frozen peas
- 20g feta cheese

Method

1. Mix the eggs, yogurt, salt, pepper and herbs together in bowl.
2. In a small frying pan, heat half the oil and gently sauté the onion and pepper. When they start to soften, add the peas and heat until the peas are defrosted and hot. Remove from the pan.
3. Wipe the pan clean, to prevent the caramelised natural sugars from the pepper from making the omelette stick!
4. Heat the remaining oil and pour in your egg mixture. Turn the heat down to medium and pop a lid on the frying pan. It is best not to play with the omelette while cooking.
5. Once it is just about cooked on top, add the vegetables and feta cheese, fold in half and serve.

Mackerel and orange salad

CREDIT: Dominique Ludwig

Mackerel is a humble superfood in my opinion. Mackerel are an abundant, low toxin fish that are rich in omega-3 fats that are essential for our brain and nervous system, as well as having anti-inflammatory properties in our body.

Serves: 2

Ingredients

- 2 fresh mackerel fillets
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 orange, sliced
- 150g watercress
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 150g cooked beetroot, sliced
- 400g tin chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 50g black olives

Dressing:

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoon lemon juice
- salt and pepper
- 200g new potatoes per serving (optional)

Method

1. Pan fry the mackerel fillets in a little olive oil. Fry for around 4 mins per side until cooked through.
2. Arrange the vegetables and sliced oranges on a plate and top with the mackerel fillets.
3. Whisk the lemon and olive oil together in a small bowl together with the salt and pepper and drizzle over the salad.

Sardine and butterbean puttanesca

CREDIT: Dominique Ludwig

Sardines are abundant, rich in omega-3 fats and sustainable. This is one fish we should definitely be eating more of, and the Atlantic diet has tapped into this beautifully.

I have switched out the pasta for butter beans to give it a more Atlantic feel and also to top up the soluble fibre significantly.

Serves: 2

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 red peppers, sliced
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 3 tablespoon capers
- 50g olives, sliced
- 1 x 400g tin butterbeans, rinsed and drained

- ¼ teaspoon chilli flakes
- 1 tin sardine fillets in olive oil, drained
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice salt and pepper
- 20g Parmesan cheese, grated

Method

1. Gently sauté the onions for 2-3 minutes in olive oil until softened, add the garlic and diced carrots and sauté for a further 2 minutes.
2. Add the tomatoes, capers, olives, butterbeans and chilli flakes and simmer gently for 10 minutes to develop the flavours and thicken.
3. Add the sardines and lemon juice at the end to protect the delicate oils in the sardines and season with salt and pepper.
4. Serve with grated parmesan cheese (optional).

Jewelled granola

This granola is sweetened just with orange juice rather than any added sugar. If you would like it to be sweeter, please feel free to add a little maple syrup. I add the chia seeds at the end to protect their delicate oils from the cooking process.

Serves: 28

Ingredients

- 300g rolled oats
- 200g sunflower seeds
- 200g pumpkin seeds
- 100g sesame seeds
- juice and zest of one orange
- 25ml good drizzle of extra virgin olive oil

'Jewels' - to add after cooking:

- 100g pistachio nuts
- 50g chia seeds
- 100g dried cranberries

Method

1. Muddle oven ingredients together in a ceramic tray and pop into the oven for 25 minutes at 160C. I don't think it needs it, but if you want to add maple syrup, do so at this stage.
2. Turn the oven off after 25 minutes and let the dish and granola cool down completely in the oven. This way it gets to become crispy, but doesn't overcook the

seeds.

3. When it is completely cold, add all the extras or the jewels, i.e. the pistachio nuts, dried cranberries, chia seeds, and perhaps some freeze-dried raspberries.

Feijoada (black beans stew)

Serves: 4

Ingredients

- 250g dried black beans, soaked overnight
- 100g streaky smoked bacon, cut into slices
- 500g pork rib
- 3 chorizo cooking sausages
- 100g diced ham
- 3 onions, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- Pinch of chilli flakes
- Olive oil
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- Handful of fresh coriander

Method

1. Fry the bacon until crisp, then set aside. Use the leftover oil in the pan to cook the ribs and chorizo sausages. Set aside.
2. Add the onion, garlic and chilli to the pan and fry until soft.
3. Add the cooked ingredients, bay leaves, white wine vinegar and drained beans to a large saucepan. Cover the ingredients with water (around 600-700ml).
4. Bring to a boil then reduce the heat to a low simmer. Cover and cook for 2 hours.
5. Garnish with coriander and serve with rice or bread.

Tomato and butterbean soup with pesto

CREDIT: Dominique Ludwig

Serves: 4, generously

Ingredients

- 1 large onion, finely sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 stick celery, chopped
- 800g fresh ripe tomatoes or 2 tins
- 4 tablespoons tomato puree
- 200g red lentils

- 400g tin butterbeans (lima beans)
- 500-800 ml vegetable stock*
- 2 bay leaves
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons green pesto (around 50g total)

Topping:

- 80g parmesan cheese or Cheddar cheese
- 75g your favourite bread

*Amount of stock depends on whether you are using tinned or fresh tomatoes. Start lower and build up as required.

Method

1. Gently sauté the onions for 2 –3 minutes in olive oil until softened, add the garlic and sauté for a further 2 minutes.
2. Add all the other vegetables and stir for a further 4-5 minutes until softened.
3. Add the tomatoes and cook for around 5 minutes, stirring occasionally to allow them to soften and reduce down.
4. Add the lentils, vegetable stock, together with the bay leaves, tomato puree, salt and pepper. Simmer, with the lid on for around 20 -25 minutes until the soup is thick and smooth. Allow to cool, then blend until smooth.
5. At the end, wash and drain your butterbeans and add to the soup. Heat through and then serve into bowls and drizzle with the pesto.
6. Grate over the cheese and serve with your bread of choice, toasted, with a thin layer of pesto.

Vegetarian moussaka

Serves: 6

This dish includes proteins from red lentils and also the dairy and cheese. I have given options to make this dairy free though, if you choose. Add some extra sunflower seeds to the topping to make it even more nutrient dense.

Ingredients

- 350g red lentils, or a mix of red and Puy
- 500g aubergines / eggplant, washed and sliced into discs
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

- 2 medium onions, finely diced
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 yellow peppers, finely diced
- 1 courgette / zucchini
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 1 tablespoon dried ginger
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon tomato puree
- 400ml vegetable stock
- Sea salt and black pepper

Cheese sauce:

- 500ml milk (dairy or soy milk is best)
- 50g gluten-free/ regular flour
- Sea salt and pepper
- Pinch of nutmeg
- 120g parmesan cheese

Dairy-free cheese sauce option:

- 500ml dairy-free milk
- 50g gluten-free flour
- Sea salt and pepper
- 50g tahini
- 2 teaspoons Marigold Bouillon powder
- 1 tablespoon nutritional yeast

Method

1. Slice the aubergines and place in a steamer over a pan of boiling water for 10-15 minutes until tender.

2. While the aubergine is steaming, sauté the onions and garlic together with the olive oil in a deep sided frying pan for 4-5 minutes. Add the lentils, finely chopped peppers and grated carrots, courgette rings, and cook for a further 3-4 minutes.

3. Stir through the ginger, cinnamon and oregano. Next, add the tinned tomatoes, tomato puree and season with salt and pepper. Add the vegetable stock.

④ Simmer for around 30 minutes with a lid on. Turn the oven on to 180C.

⑤ When cooked, add some of the aubergines to the base of a greased ceramic dish and cover with the lentils mixture. Top with more aubergine slices.

⑥ To speed things up, mix all the sauce ingredients together for the cheese sauce (except for the parmesan cheese) and heat over a medium heat, whisking all the time, until it becomes thick and creamy. When thickened, take off the heat and stir through 80g of the parmesan cheese. For the non-dairy sauce, mix all of the ingredients together in a pan and stir or whisk over a medium heat until thickened.

⑦ Pour the sauce over the final layer of aubergines and either top with the extra parmesan cheese (or sunflower seeds and nutritional yeast flakes if making dairy free).

⑧ Bake in the oven for 30 minutes until bubbling and golden.

Pesto beans

CREDIT: Dominique Ludwig

Serves: 2

This is a fun take on pesto pasta, but I am using beans instead of pasta which makes it a very gut friendly, Atlantic-style recipe.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 150g green beans, topped and tailed and each
- cut into 3 pieces
- 150g courgette cut into rings
- 100g baby spinach
- 100g green peas e.g. frozen petit pois
- 75g green pesto from recipe
- 400g tin white beans with a little of their liquid
- 30g toasted pumpkin seeds
- 30g parmesan to serve

Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a heavy bottomed frying pan and gently sauté the green beans and the courgette rings until al dente.
2. Add the frozen peas and cook for a further 2-3 minutes until they are warm.
3. Next, add the white beans with a little of their liquid with the pesto and warm through, stirring.
4. Add the spinach and allow to wilt. This should only take a couple of minutes.
5. In a separate frying pan, add the pumpkin seeds without oil and stir until they start to pop (around 3-4 minutes). Take care not to burn.
6. Serve with some shaved parmesan and the toasted pumpkin seeds.

Seafood paella

By Eleanor Steafel

Serves: 5

Ingredients

- Olive oil

- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 small dried chillies, crumbled
- 400g paella rice
- A good pinch of saffron
- 2 glasses white wine
- 1L hot fish or chicken stock
- 3 lemons (2 juiced, 1 cut into wedges to serve)
- 500g white fish like monkfish
- 20 raw prawns in their shells
- 15 rings of calamari
- 400g clams
- 200g green beans
- 1 small bunch of parsley, finely chopped

Method

① Set a large paella pan over a low-medium heat with a good glug of olive oil. Add the onions and a pinch of salt. Sauté for four or five minutes. Then add the garlic, stir well and cook for another couple of minutes, then add the paprika and chilli. When the onions are soft, turn the heat up and add the rice. Fry, stirring continuously, for three minutes or until the rice turns translucent.

② Meanwhile, mix the saffron with a splash of wine and stir to infuse.

③ Pour the rest of the wine into the pan and stir as it bubbles. When the wine has been absorbed, add the saffron, stir and then add half the stock, stir well and leave to bubble on a high heat for five minutes. Turn the heat down and leave to cook for another 10 minutes. Then add the rest of the stock and leave for another 10 minutes until the rice is tender and the stock has been absorbed. Add a little more stock if you think it needs it but not too much as you want it to form a good crust, not be creamy like an Italian risotto.

④ Add the lemon juice, taste and season.

⑤ Lay the fish on top of the rice. Take a couple of large sheets of foil and cover the pan. Turn the heat down low, and leave the fish to cook for three minutes.

⑥ Lift the foil and add the prawns, calamari, clams and beans, scattering them over the pan. Cover with foil again and leave to cook for five minutes, or until the clams have opened and prawns cooked through.

⑦ To serve, scatter with parsley, give everyone a lemon wedge and let them dive in.

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