The Mediterranean diet emphasizes plant-based foods, healthy fats, and moderate protein consumption. This dietary pattern typically includes abundant vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and olive oil as the primary fat source. Fish and seafood are consumed regularly, while poultry, eggs, and dairy are eaten in moderate amounts. Red meat is limited to a few times per month.

The diet's foundation lies in its unique composition of nutrients and bioactive compounds. Olive oil, the principal fat source, is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids and polyphenols, which have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. The high intake of vegetables and fruits provides essential vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber, while also delivering various phytochemicals that protect against oxidative stress and chronic diseases.

Research has demonstrated numerous health benefits associated with this dietary pattern. Long-term adherence has been linked to reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Studies have shown improvements in cognitive function and decreased risk of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. The diet's anti-inflammatory properties may help manage conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and other inflammatory disorders.

The Mediterranean lifestyle extends beyond food choices. Regular physical activity, adequate rest, and strong social connections are integral components. Meals are typically shared with family and friends, promoting slower eating and better digestion. The diet also emphasizes seasonal, locally sourced foods and minimal processing, which may contribute to its sustainability and health benefits.

Specific recommendations include consuming 6-8 servings of whole grains daily, at least 2 servings each of fruits and vegetables at every meal, and 2-3 servings of fish weekly. Herbs and spices are used abundantly to reduce salt intake while enhancing flavor. Wine, particularly red wine, may be consumed in moderation with meals, though this is optional and should be discussed with healthcare providers.