

THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET

THE MEDITERRANEAN PLAN
TO LOSE WEIGHT, FEEL
YOUNGER AND LIVE LONGER



RICHARD STOREY, SUE TODD
AND LOTTIE STOREY

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Authors

Title Page

Dedication

Preface: How To Use This Book

How Richard 'Discovered' The Mount Athos Diet

Chapter 1: Mount Athos – Life On The Holy Mountain

Chapter 2: What Is Fasting?

Chapter 3: Understanding The Mount Athos Diet – Why Is It Different And How Does It Work?

Chapter 4: The Benefits Of The Mount Athos Diet

Chapter 5: The Mount Athos Diet Plan

Chapter 6: Set Your Sights On Success – How To Programme Your Brain And Physiology To Lose Weight And Stay Healthy

Chapter 7: Getting Prepared For The Diet

Chapter 8: Tips For Achieving Success On The Diet

Chapter 9: Cooking Principles For The Diet

Chapter 10: Foods To Enjoy On The Mount Athos Diet

Chapter 11: What To Drink On The Mount Athos Diet

Chapter 12: Alcohol And The Diet

Chapter 13: Eating Out On The Diet

Chapter 14: Exercise, Health And The Mount Athos Diet

Chapter 15: Meditation And Spiritual Well-being

Chapter 16: Maintaining The Diet

Chapter 17: Fast Day Recipes

Chapter 18: Moderation Day Recipes

Chapter 19: Feast Days

Chapter 20: Menu Planner

Chapter 21: Mount Athos Diet Success Stories

After The Mount Athos Diet – What Then?

Appendix I: Conversion Tables

Appendix II: Further Sources And Resources

Endnotes

Index

Acknowledgements

Copyright

About the Book

For centuries, the monks of Mount Athos have enjoyed long lives, healthy bodies and calm minds thanks to their unique diet and lifestyle. Now you too can discover the secrets of good nutrition from this ancient community in a remarkable new diet book.

In *The Mount Athos Diet*, you'll follow the intermittent diet that keeps the monks slim, youthful and largely free from disease. The diet is made up of three easy-to-follow patterns throughout the week:

- Three fasting days full of delicious fruits and vegetables from nature's larder
- Three moderation days to enjoy the best of the Mediterranean, including olive oil, fish and even red wine
- One feast day to completely indulge in whichever foods you like

With a simple diet plan, recipes, menu planners and tips on how to adapt the diet, plus guidance on exercise, meditation and emotional wellbeing, *The Mount Athos Diet* promises to transform your body and mind to help you lose weight, feel fitter and live longer.

About the Authors

Richard Storey is a writer, photographer and a strong advocate of the life-changing potential of the Mount Athos Diet. He has personal knowledge of the Orthodox monastic life having for the past 15 years visited Mount Athos annually, both as a pilgrim and a voluntary worker. His photographic essay, *Images of Mount Athos*, was exhibited at Bridgewater House, London and at Highgrove House, Gloucestershire. Richard is an accomplished cook, trained in Classic French, Spanish, Indonesian, Thai and Modern British cookery. This is his fourth book.

Sue Todd is an editor who trained in nutrition, and through her career in food always aimed to help make healthy eating easier and more enjoyable. She has a degree in nutrition and worked as a State Registered Dietitian in the NHS in London for five years, before becoming the nutritionist at the consumer magazine, *Which?*. She then edited food websites for the BBC, UKTV and Carlton Food Network, and was Producer on BBC Radio 4's *Food Programme*. She was a trustee of the Caroline Walker Trust for over 10 years.

Lottie Storey is a writer who lives in Bristol with her husband and two young sons. Her work on the BBC Food website - recipe development, writing and proofing - contributed to the team winning the 'Best Interactive Media' Glenfiddich Food & Drink Award 2003 and an EMMA Award in 2002. In 2008 she founded a new branch of the Women's Institute. She has worked in publishing, digital marketing, PR, film, television, and the arts, and

now writes full time, developing recipes and content for a range of clients, and writes her own blog - oysterandpearl.co.uk

THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET

THE MEDITERRANEAN PLAN
**TO LOSE WEIGHT, LOOK
YOUNGER AND LIVE LONGER**

By Richard Storey, Sue Todd and Lottie Storey

Vermilion
LONDON

This book is dedicated to

*The Holy Fathers of Mount Athos, with gratitude for their
inspiration.*

– Richard Storey

Eddy and Fenwick – Big love to you both.

– Sue Todd

*Ben, Arthur and Ted – Thank you for being so patient and
kind, and for overlooking the mess in the kitchen. You are
my world.*

– Lottie Storey

PREFACE

The Mount Athos Diet is a safe and easy-to-follow way to help you lose weight and look and feel a lot healthier. It does not involve any severe deprivation, or counting of calories. Nor will you have to buy special diet meals or drinks. All you will need to do is follow some straightforward principles and cook from a selection of delicious recipes. When you have reached your target weight, you should find it easy to maintain your new way of eating as well as your new weight and body shape.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is structured in such a way that you can dip in and out of sections as you wish. You don't have to read it from cover to cover. Most readers will want to know 'what do I have to do?' and will turn immediately to the chapters concerned with the diet plan, recipes and ingredients. Whether you are vegetarian, a meat eater or vegan, there are plenty of recipes and advice to suit your lifestyle. Others will have questions about the background to the Mount Athos Diet: where does it come from, who else has tried it and what are their stories? There are further chapters devoted to exercise, drinking alcohol and meditation for readers who are interested in developing further aspects of their journey to a long-term way of eating and living a healthy life.

For further support and information, including beautiful images and more recipes, visit The Mount Athos Diet website: www.themountathosdiet.co.uk; find us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/themountathosdiet, or follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/mountathosdiet

A Word About Health

The Mount Athos Diet has been co-designed by a professional dietitian and its nutritionally balanced recipes will deliver a controlled and healthy weight loss. However, if you have any medical condition, are taking medication or are pregnant, breastfeeding or have an eating disorder, you should seek advice from your GP before starting any diet or exercise programme.

A Note On Ingredients

Unless specified, vegetables are peeled, and all ingredients should be the best quality available. Where possible, use organic or free-range eggs, dairy, meat and sustainable seafood.

HOW RICHARD 'DISCOVERED' THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET

I enjoy my food – and drink.

I have always been a gourmet (gourmand, some would say). My mother was a professional caterer, then a cook, then a cookery teacher. From the age of five I was a regular in her professional kitchen, helping prepare vegetables or stirring a pot. My father's first career was a farmer, then a market gardener. He fished or shot almost every day so my pocket money was earned from the preparation of fish or game for the family table. My father also grew his own fruit and vegetables and so I was weaned on organic produce long before it became modish.

It is no surprise that, since leaving school and home, I have been the cook for fellow flatmates, girlfriends, wife and family – catering, purchasing, preparing ingredients and cooking meals. Cooking for others can be a delight, but the rewards carry with them some major temptations. To cook properly, from scratch using raw ingredients, it is important that everything should be tasted throughout the process. This – and the gourmand in me – has meant that like many of us in the Western world I seem to be forever watching my weight.

Over the years I have fallen for many improbable but tempting diet plans, my bathroom scales fluctuating by as much as 13 kg (28 lb) from any one time to another. Up to a

point the diets I followed did work – in the short term. I lost some weight, felt smug when friends and colleagues remarked on my success, and then felt depressed as the weight soon bounced back to where I first started – usually plus some.

Two years ago all this changed.

My wife and I had arranged a four-week holiday in Cape Town, South Africa. This was to be my first visit and I had no real idea of the culinary treats that awaited me. I also had no idea how life changing this visit would become.

South Africa is famous for its seductive and indulgent ‘rainbow’ cuisine – an eclectic mix of styles and content, inspired by colonisation, immigration and of course, indigenous products. In Cape Town, everybody who can eats out and food is plentiful and inexpensive. A ‘bring your own’ policy in most restaurants helps sensible diners save even more money on their wine. The combination of large portions and inexpensive wine immediately signalled to me the onset of yet another ballooning waistline. The prospect of a gourmet four-week stay in this beautiful country started to ring alarm bells.

Then I remembered Mount Athos.

Mount Athos in northern Greece is one of the world’s most beautiful, unspoilt places and the home to 20 Orthodox monasteries. Shortly before leaving for South Africa I had returned home from a week spent on ‘The Holy Mountain’ as it is sometimes called. I had been staying as a pilgrim and guest of the monks, living alongside them, walking from monastery to monastery – eating, drinking and, by default, following the monks’ diet: the Mount Athos Diet. When I returned home I felt fitter and more relaxed, and looked healthier.

Each monastery is largely self-sufficient, and chiefly as a part of their religious observance and also to preserve food stocks, the monks eat differently on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday. On these three days they eat what we would

call a vegan diet: they avoid meat, fish, dairy produce and wine, and they don't use oil to cook. For the remainder of the week they eat dairy, eggs and fish, use olive oil to cook, and drink red wine. One week of living with the Holy Fathers saw me lose 0.9 kg (2 lb) in weight – without trying, and without any lingering sense of deprivation.

Arriving in Cape Town, I took one look at the temptations of the South African diet and thought – no. I have been away for a week, I've lost weight, and I feel much better for it. Instead of chilling out for a month, putting it all back on and returning home bloated, I thought: why not continue following the Mount Athos way of eating vegan for three days of the week?

Everyone thought I was crazy: 'On holiday in a gastronomic heaven like South Africa, and you want to FAST?'

But the monks don't really fast. They eat sensibly and moderately throughout the week, indulging perhaps at the weekend, celebrating one or other of their many Feast Days. So, that is what I did. For four weeks on holiday I avoided meat and dairy produce for three days, and ate sensibly for the remainder of the week. I found it surprisingly easy to incorporate the three vegan days into my week; eating moderately, enjoying dairy products, fish and white meat and wine on the three other days; and feasting on anything I wanted on the final day. To be truthful, any weight loss that I actually achieved while on holiday was counteracted by rather too much beer, and injudicious snacking, but four weeks later I returned home no heavier than when I had left.

I had discovered The Mount Athos Diet.

CHAPTER 1

MOUNT ATHOS – LIFE ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

The monks of Mount Athos have been eating the same way for well over 1,000 years. Theirs truly is a 'diet for life'. So, how did this extraordinary place – the Holy Mountain – first begin?

There is evidence that the first Christian hermits settled in Mount Athos in the 7th century. Today, Mount Athos is a self-governing monastic republic, which forms part of the Halkidiki region of Northern Greece, one of three peninsulas that dip south like fingers into the Aegean Sea. A natural ecosystem with rich biodiversity, it is one of the only UNESCO World Heritage sites recognised for both its cultural and natural significance. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary, who after Christ's death had joined the disciples, was sailing with St John the Evangelist towards Cyprus to visit Lazarus. Caught in a sudden storm, their boat was blown on to the Athos peninsula. Mary walked ashore and was immediately overwhelmed by the wild, unspoilt beauty of the mountain. She blessed the land and it became consecrated as the Virgin's Garden and she declared that in future, all female creatures would be barred from Athos. Apart from the wild animals and cats (encouraged in order to keep down the rodent population) Athos has remained a male dominion.

The first Orthodox monastery was founded in AD 866 and today 20 main monasteries remain, plus outlying villages, or *sketes*, and countless individual cells, each occupied by one or two ageing monks. In total, around 2,500 monks live throughout Mount Athos. There is a considerable age range: some monks are well into their nineties, but most are in their thirties and forties. Some have been monks for decades, while others were novices until recently, and all represent a wide cross-section of society. Orthodoxy and nationalism are closely connected: apart from Greek monasteries there are Russian, Serbian and Bulgarian monasteries, which cater largely to their own citizens. Monks themselves come from all over the world, including the USA, Britain, Australia and France.

Despite numerous threats to their existence – rapid technological advances, secularism and political interference – the monks' daily routine and diet have barely changed in the past 1,150 years.

LIFE INSIDE THE MONASTERIES

Monastic life revolves around prayer. Much of the day is spent in the church, conducting services, which can last several hours. Despite having abandoned the world, the chief duty of the monks is to pray for the world although monastic life is not entirely introspective. Several monasteries are closely involved with various outside charitable causes which support refugees, help develop young people, offer drug addicts a new perspective, and raise funds for natural disasters.

The monasteries themselves are surprisingly large and some even appear to resemble small towns. They are walled and gated communities, originally designed to provide protection against marauding pirates and Crusaders who would make every effort to conquer and loot

the Holy Mountain of its priceless icons, relics and manuscripts.

Not surprisingly, the daily upkeep of such large and busy communities is laborious. Apart from some help from outside workers, the monks rely on their own talents and are remarkably self-sufficient. Much building restoration and general upkeep is carried out using traditional methods and equipment. Recently, modernity has slowly arrived in the form of 4x4s, telephones and the internet, but Athos remains largely immune from what Henry Adams recognised in the 1890s as 'accelerating change'.

Despite an unavoidable creep towards some features of a 21st-century lifestyle, in most respects the Athos of today remains a world apart. The world of the monasteries still uses the old Julian calendar, meaning that Mount Athos is 13 days behind mainland Greece and the rest of Europe. The monastic liturgical day begins, not at midnight but at sunset, meaning that the monks are five hours ahead of what the monks refer to as 'the World'.

No television, no musical instruments, no advertising hoardings, no news media, no noise, no air pollution. Everything about the monks' world seems aimed at keeping life in the slow lane for as long as is possible. Austere as they may sound to our Western ears these self-imposed anachronisms certainly add to the mystic, other-worldliness of the place and the exclusiveness of the monasteries of Mount Athos forms a core part of their survival.

VISITING THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Athos is not the easiest place to visit. Firstly, as decreed by the Blessed Virgin Mary, women are barred from entering the Holy Mountain. In addition to Orthodox men who are allowed entry each day, 10 non-Orthodox pilgrims are also granted permission to visit. Visitors apply well ahead for a

diamoniterion, an elaborately stamped and signed pass which allows the bearer to stay on Mount Athos for three nights only, in separate monasteries. Reservations for overnight stays in individual monasteries have to be made well in advance, by phone, letter or fax.

Every morning, at 9.45am a ferry departs for Mount Athos, dispensing passengers at various coastal monasteries, which lie on the route to Daphne, a tiny port some two hours down the peninsula. Departing pilgrims are rounded up and the ferry makes its way back to Ouranopoulis, where it first started. This round trip, weather permitting, takes place 365 days of the year.

To maintain this constant flow the monasteries are busy places, catering to the needs of hundreds of visitors throughout the year. No charge is made, or expected, for either accommodation or food. It is the obligation of all monasteries to do their best to take in visiting pilgrims and offer succour and a bed for the night.

MONKS, THEIR GUESTS AND THE DAILY ROUND

The monks' day is divided equally into three: prayer, work and sleep. At the start of each year the Abbot distributes work assignments to all members of the Brotherhood who will retain their allotted job for 12 months, perhaps longer.

There is much to be done. As part of their religion, Orthodox monasteries are obliged to accept pilgrims where they can. The Greek for stranger is *xenios*, which also means 'guest'. Greeting and playing host to strangers was considered important by the early Greeks, who thought that the gods mingled among them, so failing in one's duty as host carried the risk of incurring the wrath of a god disguised as the stranger.

Greeks incorporate *xenia* into their customs and manners and it is now standard practice throughout much (if not all) of Greece. Some monasteries take only a handful of pilgrims; others welcome hundreds per day and these visiting strangers have to be housed and fed. Food needs to be prepared, cooked and served, refectory tables cleared away and re-set for the next meal, facilities need cleaning, beds require a daily linen change.

Many monks rarely leave the confines of their monastery. When they do, it may be to take the ferry to the mainland, or perhaps to visit a neighbouring monastery. Although transport can be found, walking remains the preferred way of getting around the peninsula, which is criss-crossed with ancient, paved Byzantine mule tracks. It can take as much as three to five hours to reach the nearest monastery, double if returning the same day.

The life of a monk might be contemplative and spiritual, but it is also a life kept busy with an endless rota of daily chores: monasticism is never a sedentary occupation. Whatever task has been assigned to a monk, a third of his day is highly active whether on the land, in the kitchens, fishing, restoring buildings, making beds or cleaning.

Tending the gardens, orchards and beehives is also a continuous process. Planting, watering, weeding, training, pruning and harvesting year in, year out is tough for the monks, especially when carried out under an unrelenting Greek sun while clothed from head to foot in black garments. Even so, the monks enjoy gardening, recognising it as one of the best workouts available. Good, old-fashioned aerobic exercise means that it is unusual to see a really chubby monk.

HOW THE MONKS EAT

The Mount Athos Diet is one of the world's best-kept secrets.

Studies have shown that the monasteries of Athos are among the world's healthiest communities. The monks live very long lives, largely free of cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's. Their way of eating also carries with it an enticing by-product: natural weight loss.

The monks don't count calories, nor do they suffer any of the deprivation commonly associated with the 'fad' diets of the Western world. Theirs is not really a 'diet', more a way of life. They eat good food and drink good wine, and by following age-old principles of using wholesome ingredients, eating in moderation and exercising regularly, they are among the fittest and healthiest people on earth.

Each monastery is largely self-sufficient and very little produce is bought in from the mainland. The monasteries are surrounded by kitchen gardens, orchards, vineyards, beehives and olive groves, and everything produced is organic and seasonal; much time-consuming effort is required to nurture crops and maintain the maximum possible output from the land. Monasteries have their own little harbours, from which to sail their fishing boats. Fishing sorties are usually a prelude to a forthcoming Feast Day, when vast quantities of fish are scaled, gutted and prepared for the pot.

Monastery meals are an extension of the daily religious observance, occurring twice a day – morning and evening. Meals are consumed in silence, as the monks listen to the daily readings from the scriptures (with occasional interruptions from the Abbot). Most meals last around 20 minutes and end when the Abbot rings a bell. Although the monks regard eating as 'refuelling' their food is tasty and varied with soups, greens, beans and pulses, home-produced salads, bread and fruit dominating the menu.

Their pattern of eating remains constant: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are regarded as Fast Days when

the diet is essentially vegan – no dairy or animal protein, no wine or olive oil. Fast Day cooking is done with water, rather than oil. Despite some restrictions, a typical Fast Day ‘menu’ will include plenty of food; it is quite common for food to be left over, to be recycled for the next meal or fed to the monastery cats, nurtured for their rodent-catching skills, so nobody goes hungry.

The remainder of the week (unless there is a Feast Day looming) is given over to Moderation Days when the daily menu expands to include fish, cheese, eggs, yogurt and red wine.

Feast Days are joyous occasions, when home-caught fish dominates the menu, cakes, sweets and even ice cream may be served. These are seen by the monks as ‘treats’, but even so – always consumed in moderation.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting can take several different forms. If a doctor tells you to fast it means drinking only water and eating nothing at all. In a religious sense, spiritual fasting varies among the different faiths, and the intensity of a fast may depend on how orthodox or devout you are. For example, nothing must pass the lips of Muslims during daylight hours through the month of the Islamic fast of Ramadan, or in the case of Catholicism, no meat should be eaten on Fridays (so fish became the traditional choice).

Fasting doesn't always mean no food. It often means simpler food. In the Greek Orthodox Church this means abstaining from meat, fish or dairy products (cheese, milk, yogurt), and no oil or alcohol. You are eating only what your body needs to function properly and no more. In the case of the Mount Athos Diet, we are following the fasting rules of the monks. For them, fasting means eating in a simple, restrained and modest way, as well as avoiding the excesses of meat, dairy, oil and alcohol. Meals are simple and small, and they don't snack.

To all intents and purposes, the monks are eating a vegan diet on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. But ask any monk why they eat vegan, and they are unlikely to have an answer, primarily because they don't see their diet as being specifically vegan.

The monks do not consider that they have a restricted diet on Fast Days – more a different diet. It is all part of their desire to do things in moderation. Their form of intermittent fasting is a way of giving their bodies a rest, cleansing not only their body, but their mind too. Monks are not particularly interested in the remarkable benefits that fasting can bring: better health, weight control, a longer life. To the monks, these are mildly interesting by-products of a way of life that they have followed for over 1,000 years; monastery food is a means to an end.

Monastery meals are communal affairs, and are always taken in the refectory found opposite the main church doors. This arrangement makes it easy for the monks to incorporate their meals into their liturgical pattern; they are an extension of the church services. Regular fasting offers the monks the chance to subdue any urge to over-indulge, allowing them to concentrate fully on the monk who is charged with reading extracts from the scriptures. Their moderation helps them keep greed at bay: ‘Fasting and self-control are virtues’.

FASTING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Both fasting and the vegan diet have become hugely popular in today’s dietary circles, and yet neither is a new concept. As far back as the mid 1800s a Dr Hookey wrote *The No Breakfast Plan*. Veganism was long ago advocated for promoting better health and spiritual development and can be traced back to eastern Mediterranean and ancient Indian societies. The Greek philosopher Pythagoras promoted the vegan way of life over 2,500 years ago while many of the world’s religions – Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Shintoism – also advocate vegetarianism and periodic fasting. Periodic fasting has also long been

practised by Jews, Christians and Muslims as a form of penance and purification.

Over the past 100 years, medics around the world have cited fasting as a cure for anything from rheumatism to infectious diseases to bowel cleansing.

HOW THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET FAST DAYS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO BETTER HEALTH

There is little doubt that the monks of Mount Athos enjoy long and exceptionally healthy lives, free from many of the ailments that plague the Western world. A relatively slow life enjoyed with a lack of existential cares clearly plays a part in their remarkable health record, but so too does their adherence to three weekly vegan days.

The natural reduction in calories on Fast Days brings with it many health benefits. However, it is our belief that fasting alone does not contribute to the monks' health record. It is the *combination* of fasting and the addition of a further three days of moderation, that helps maintain both physical and mental health.

Fasting (and moderation) let the body rest and cleanse itself. There is an increasing amount of evidence that short periods of fasting can deliver many health benefits. It seems to improve blood pressure (which influences the risk of strokes and heart disease), improve insulin sensitivity (making you less prone to diabetes), improve your blood lipid profile (the fats and cholesterol in your blood), and there is also evidence of it making you live longer, improving brain health and reducing the risk of cancer.

Early evening meals play their part, too. The earlier we eat our final meal of the day, the longer our bodies have time to rest and recuperate. Much of the West seems to

regard eating as a 24/7 pastime, whereas the Mount Athos Diet fasting is simply a way of balancing eating differently with eating moderately. It is eminently doable.

The monks of Mount Athos eat this way every week, every month, every year. It is not, for them, a 'diet' in the Western sense; it is a way of life – and its continuity throws up few challenges or a serious risk of 'falling off the wagon'. The yo-yo effects that many modern diet regimes result in simply means that, once the dieter goes back to a 'normal' pattern of eating, body weight comes bouncing back, usually much quicker than it came off.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET

WHY IS IT DIFFERENT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Studies show that the monks of Mount Athos are among the healthiest people on earth. The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki has conducted research into the health, fitness and longevity of the monks. The findings are startling. Cancers are almost unheard of, especially cancer of the stomach and intestines, the oesophagus and digestive tract, the bladder and prostate. Strokes and cardiac arrests are almost non-existent and Alzheimer's disease is unheard of.

The monks live on average far longer than men on mainland Greece. The monastery graveyards are populated by men who survived well into their eighties or nineties. In two monastery graveyards, researched in May 2013, the average age of the monks buried there was 87 in the first and 89 in the second. The life expectancy of a British male is 79 and a Greek male is 78 (World Health Organisation: 2011).

The monks' unusual longevity is put down to the monastic way of eating which is similar to a typical Greek peasant diet, the so-called Mediterranean diet - a high intake of vegetables, beans and pulses, fruit, nuts, whole grains and olive oil. At the same time, the Mediterranean

diet includes a moderate intake of fish, poultry and red wine, and a low intake of dairy products, red meat, processed foods and sweets.

All the food eaten in the monasteries is fresh, organic and seasonal. The monks eat no meat or processed foods, and alternate oil-based meals with water-based meals, giving the stomach a chance to rest three times a week.

The monks of Mount Athos have been eating this way for well over 1,000 years and eating forms part of their religious observance. The Mount Athos Diet has barely changed over the centuries and is here to stay.

WHY YOU WILL LOVE THE MOUNT ATHOS DIET

The Mount Athos Diet is not the usual fixed regime, with strict rules and packets of formula food. It is a sustainable and moderate way of eating. If you already enjoy the delights of fresh, seasonal vegetables and plant-based meals, and savour the clean, light taste of fish and chicken, this diet will suit you well. If on the other hand your shopping list normally includes ready-meals, processed foods, lots of red meat and alcohol, then the Mount Athos Diet promises to be a genuine revelation.

It will only take you two to three weeks to notice how your body and metabolism are responding to subtle changes in your eating and shopping habits. Volunteers who followed the Mount Athos Diet have repeatedly told us that it has brought about a remarkable mind-shift – permanent changes of focus and perception:

- a greater knowledge about and enjoyment of cooking and eating vegetables;
- the lack of hunger pangs;
- the lack of any sense of deprivation;

- less desire for red meat;
- a huge reduction in the consumption of processed foods;
- a flexible eating and dieting schedule;
- a sensible level of alcohol consumption;
- a huge drop in food wastage;
- a significant saving in food and drink bills.

FAD DIETS

Diets come, diets go. It is estimated that in the UK, with 12 million people obese, and a further 24 million overweight, at any one time there are around 27 million people on some form of diet. And many of these diets are what we call 'fad diets'. The term 'fad diet' is faintly scornful, as these diets rapidly become popular then, just as rapidly, fall out of fashion. Remember the Grapefruit Diet? The Cabbage Soup Diet? The Blood Type Diet? The Zone Diet? The Atkins Diet? The Dukan Diet? The South Beach Diet? All hugely successful in their day – in the short term. 'Fad' often also means a diet that is not based on the generally accepted principles of healthy eating, and is often found to be largely unworkable or impossible to keep to.

THE DEPRIVATION TRAP

Most diets ultimately fail because they are centred on deprivation in some form. Most people are capable of changing their shopping habits and eating patterns for a short while. An initial, intoxicating euphoria greets the onset of any new diet, then something gets in the way. If it's not good old-fashioned temptation – that irresistible urge to open the refrigerator door every time you walk past, or to check the biscuit tin for any last remaining

occupants – then it's social pressure. Major difficulties can arise when confronted by a limited restaurant menu, or a plate of food put before you by well-meaning friends in their home, not to mention the nibbles table at a party, so tempting to graze from throughout the evening.

Deprivation simply heightens the urge to have whatever it is that you are missing. The very fact that the latest diet bans you from having something you love soon makes it become the focus of your attention. If deprived long enough, temptation becomes unbearable and 'just a little bit won't do me any harm' quickly slides into a full-blown binge. No chocolate for a week – then two whole bars in one go. After this, and having defaulted a few more times, most dieters end up thinking: 'The hell with it. This diet isn't working. I give up.'

It's not the diets that are at fault; it's the unnatural and continuous bouts of deprivation they make you endure. The reason crash or fad diets usually fail is that they involve savage cutbacks in calorie intake and serious deprivation, forcing the body to break down muscle to use as energy. Crash diets inevitably result in an apparent loss of weight, but very often, this weight loss is due to a reduction in glycogen and protein, as well as fat. Eventually, the body strives to preserve the depleted energy stores and the initial weight loss starts to plateau. The lower your muscle mass, the lower your metabolism, making it far easier to put body fat back on when coming off the diet. Diets such as this always work for a short while but ultimately your body thinks it's starving and seeks every opportunity to regain the weight lost. Yo-yo dieting is a metabolic roller coaster.

If that isn't enough to put you off, apart from providing a quick fix through poor nutrition the rapid weight loss resulting from a crash diet also results in a loss of supportive fat beneath the skin, which, in turn, can lead to wrinkles.