

NUTRITION

Healthy Eating for 3 Ethnic Populations

A “good” diet and lifestyle are generally considered to be the foundation of a healthy life. However, any attempt to prove that we can all adopt a standard formula for a healthy diet or lifestyle is bound to fail. From infancy throughout childhood each person’s tastes have been imprinted by their environment, which probably served our ancestors well when the food supply posed dangers from poisonous foods and unexpected shortages. Now as the dangers from our food supply relate more to an excess of availability, we must find ways to promote a healthy diet and lifestyle within the framework of the current environment in which obesity and sedentary lifestyle are the greatest threats to health. To be successful, the health professional must consider the meaning of a healthy diet and lifestyle from the perspective of the culture to which individuals identify, including their communication style and their values, which may govern their choice of food.

In fact, as the world populations become more transient and the food supply more global, ethnic populations in the United States may find it easier to transition into the mainstream. However, loss of cultural identity is often seen as a threat to personal identity. As large populations have settled together, access

to traditional foods is often sought to help maintain cultural bonds. It is not uncommon therefore to see dietary patterns incorporate traditional foods at the dinner meal and common American selections at breakfast time. Unfortunately, as dietary choices accompany the passage into conventional society greater health risks are often associated with the new dietary practices. Cultures that are associated with traditionally well balanced diets, for example the Mexican diet, may now incorporate some more popular but less nutritious American foods as the individual becomes more acculturated into American society. It is often the offspring who were raised in a traditional ethnic environment and wish to become more familiar with American foods that are in most desperate need of guidance. They may also suffer from the collision of traditional stereotypes with current scientific knowledge. Contento et al.¹ in a study of body image, weight and food choice amongst Latina women and their children, found Latina women did not perceive their body size as a risk factor for heart disease even within the group with BMI values of 32 to 42. These same researchers found that Latina women preferred a plumper figure for their children. They conclude that the preference for a plumper body size in children could be due to cultural preference. It is this audience that will receive the greatest potential benefit from nutrition messages which can help them to incorporate new yet healthful eating habits.

Research from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that certain illnesses are associated more strongly with different ethnic populations.² The focus of this discussion will be to present culturally sensitive approaches to dietary modification that can lower the health risks of members of the African American, Mexican American and Asian American populations.

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Summary of the African American Diet (soul food):

CORE FOODS	SECONDARY FOODS	INFREQUENT FOODS
Biscuits, Rice, Cornbread, Corn/Grits, Cooked Green Leafy Vegetables, Okra, Tomatoes, Beans/Peas, Yams/Sweet Potatoes, Meat especially Pork, Variety Cuts of Meat, Chicken especially Fried, Bacon/salt pork	White bread, Spaghetti with meat sauce, Macaroni with cheese, Fish, White Potatoes, Vegetables, Sweet desserts, Sweetened beverages	Fresh vegetables, Fruit, Dairy Products

African American cooking originated when slaves were brought to the colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since slaves were brought from different parts of Africa and settled into different regions within the United States, the culinary practices represent a variety of backgrounds. Slaves often received the discards from their master's diet so "soul" food was made from all parts of the animal and plant. Also, since time and cooking facilities were limited, many dishes were made as stews or one pot meals.

Vegetables are usually boiled or stewed and generously seasoned with fat such as bacon, bacon grease, pigtails, ham hocks, fatback, butter, margarine, oil and sometimes sugar. Green leafy vegetables such as collard, mustard, turnip, kale, dandelion greens, spinach are collectively known as "greens" and eaten seasoned as other vegetables.

Vegetables such as okra, green tomatoes, squash, onion and eggplant are often battered and fried. Macaroni and cheese, potato salad, coleslaw, poultry stuffing and mashed potatoes are often considered a vegetable or side dish. Pickles and relishes made from salted and preserved vegetables are frequently consumed with lunch and supper meals.

Starchy vegetables such as dried beans, peas, corn and white potatoes are very popular. Grains

such as grits, cornbread, rice, biscuits, muffins and cooked cereal are basic to the soul food diet.

A variety of beef, pork, poultry and fish are part of the African American diet. Meats are often breaded and fried which is the preferred preparation method. Typical breakfast meats may include sausage, bacon, ham, fatback, and pork chops. Spareribs are often grilled or oven baked with barbeque sauce. Chicken is frequently fried but may be grilled, baked or boiled with barbeque sauce. Saltwater and freshwater fish are commonly consumed often dredged in cornmeal and fried. Hush puppies, fried corn meal and French fried potatoes are a popular accompaniment to fish. Lunch meats such as bologna, sausage and ham are frequently consumed as alternatives to cooked meats.

Whole milk (sweet milk) and buttermilk are popular milk selections as a beverage and used in cooking. Lower fat milk choices are becoming more popular. Fresh, frozen and canned fruits such as, peaches, plums, apples, honeydew melon, watermelon and cantaloupe are popular fruit choices when in season.

Fats are used to season foods including fatback, salt pork, bacon, crackling and ham hocks. Chitterlings, the intestine of the hog may be boiled or battered

and deep fried and served with sauce. Lard and shortening are traditional fats used for baking and frying meats and vegetables. Mayonnaise and salad dressing are used as sandwich spreads.

Heavily sweetened ice tea and lemonade and sodas are common beverage choices.

Desserts are frequent daily fare in the African American home. Pies, cakes, cobblers, ice cream are some common choices.

Diet Modification:

The five leading causes of death in the US in 2000 for Blacks or African Americans according to the CDC were:

1. cardiovascular disease
2. cancer
3. stroke
4. unintentional injuries
5. diabetes

Given the incidence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and hypertension leading to stroke in the African American community, dietary modifications to decrease saturated fat, sodium, calorie and sugar intake is appropriate. Emphasis can be placed on the positive attributes of the soul food diet. Individuals should be encouraged to eat more whole wheat and whole grain breads and cereals. Fresh fruit and vegetables are strengths of the diet and should be encouraged. Beans and peas can be combined with grains to provide ample protein when a

decreased saturated fat intake is recommended. Grilling, baking and broiling should be encouraged rather than frying. Liberal use of herbal seasonings and liquid smoke can replace the high sodium, high saturated fat seasonings more commonly used in soul food preparation. Although some refined sugars may be acceptable, use of alternative sweeteners in beverages is advisable. Low fat milk alternatives such as frozen yogurt, low fat milk and puddings should be encouraged. For those individuals that are lactose intolerant, low fat cheese and yogurt in addition to soy milk and fortified juices can provide the needed calcium.

Those who must lower sodium intake

should be discouraged from consuming pickled, smoked or salt cured seasonings, relishes or meats. Prepared and canned foods should be replaced with fresh and frozen whenever possible.

Intake of high fat meats such as chicken wings, lunch meats, and high fat cuts of meat can be replaced with lower fat cuts such as flank, round or shoulder steaks. Lunch meats such as sliced turkey and ham are lower fat choices as well. Chicken and turkey breasts and legs can be prepared baked, grilled or broiled with herbs and spices for flavoring.

The strength of the African American diet is its liberal use of whole grains, beans and peas, fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables.

The liberal consumption of green leafy vegetables should be encouraged as a source of calcium, vitamin C and carotenoids especially for those African Americans who are lactose intolerant. Lower salt and saturated fat alternatives such as garlic, olive oil, onions and liquid smoke can be used to replace the salt pork, bacon or fat back commonly used in cooking the greens. In addition, individuals should be encouraged to lower their saturated fat and sodium intake by baking, grilling and broiling lower fat cuts of meat, poultry and fish. Sweetened beverages and dessert intake should be kept minimal if weight control and/or diabetes are a concern for the individual.



Summary of the Mexican American Diet:

CORE FOODS	SECONDARY FOODS	INFREQUENT FOODS
Tortillas, flour and Corn, Rice, Store-bought bread, Dried, cooked beans, Chilies (92 varieties), Tomatillos, Potatoes, Corn, Squash, Tomatoes, Sweetened Beverages,	Breakfast Cereal, Meat, Poultry, Eggs, Fish, Fruits, Baked custards, bread and rice pudding, Ice Cream	Milk (for children)

The Mexican American diet reflects the influences of its Spanish and Indian heritage. It relies heavily on complex carbohydrates and includes fresh fruits and vegetables rich in vitamin A and vitamin C. Mexican American preparation methods are based on stove top cooking which includes mostly fried foods, using considerable quantities of oil and lard. Meats used in this style of cooking are often high fat cuts. Milk is generally considered a drink for children, adults preferring to consume highly sweetened or alcoholic beverages. Rice, beans and tortillas are frequent accompaniments at all meals.

Dietary Modifications:

The five leading causes of death in the US in 2000 for Hispanics or Latinos were

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Unintentional injuries
4. Stroke
5. Diabetes

One substitution that can reduce the risk of heart disease in the Mexican American population would be to recommend the use of canola, olive, safflower, soybean or corn oil instead of lard containing saturated fat when frying food. If weight control is a concern, replace frying as a preparation method with baking, broiling and grilling. Leaner cuts of meat such as flank, round or shoulder steak or pork that can be stewed or grilled (asadas) are preferable. The use of beans and peas with rice should be encouraged and can substitute for other high fat protein

sources. In fact, preparation of frijoles cocidos (boiled beans) instead of frijoles refritos (refried beans) is suggested. The intake of fresh fruit and vegetables at each meal should be encouraged. Fresh salsas and citrus fruit are popular and healthy additions that provide considerable quantities of vitamins and minerals.

It is good advice to choose part-skim cheese (queso fresco) and skim or lowfat milk instead of whole milk or cream, including preparation of custards and puddings. Rather than frying tortillas, tortillas should be heated in the microwave or oven wrapped in foil. Baked tortillas can substitute for fried chips.

Sweetened beverages should be replaced with water, diet sodas or unsweetened iced tea.

Encourage adults to drink lowfat milk in beverages for its calcium contribution if cheese intake is low. If calorie control is appropriate, sweetened desserts should be replaced with fresh fruit.

Additional salt should only be added during food preparation not at the table. Food should be tasted before adding salt.

Reduce salty snack foods such as fried pork rinds (chicharrones) and dips.

Substitute other spices for salt such as chilies, onion, garlic, oregano, cilantro for meat tenderizers and salted seasonings.

An adequate intake of protein is essential especially when restricting calories.

Recommended daily protein intake for the average man would be equivalent to 2 eggs, 3 ounces of meat, fish or chicken and 1 cup of beans with rice.

The strength of the Mexican American diet is its inclusion of whole grains, brown rice, fresh fruits and vegetables providing ample fiber, vitamin and minerals. Adequate protein from fish, chicken, meat and eggs with consideration of lower saturated fat choices and preparation methods make the Mexican American diet a healthy diet.



Summary of Asian American Diet:

CORE FOODS	SECONDARY FOODS	INFREQUENT FOODS
Hot cereal, Soy milk, Fruit Juice, Nuts, Rice, Vegetables, Tofu, Noodles, Buns, Fruit, Peppers (Thai and Korean), Cabbage (Korean), Seaweed (Japanese)	Fish, poultry, pork, Egg, Seafood, Beans (green, lima)	Beef, Cheese, Milk, Butter, Bread

Asian cultural eating patterns vary according to local climate and availability of food sources. Although quite different in many ways, Asian eating patterns share many similarities. Freshness of food is a prized quality and an emphasis on rice and vegetables at meals with relatively little meat consumption is another common bond. Most Asians living in America adhere to a traditional Asian diet interspersed with American food. Fish, pork, poultry and eggs constitute the major protein sources, with significant amounts of nuts and dried beans combined with rice to add more complete protein sources.

Vegetables and fruits make up a large part of their food intake. Rice is generally eaten at all meals. Asian food preparation techniques include stir-frying, barbecuing, boiling, steaming with occasional deep frying. Japanese food preparation is more concerned with visual appearance of food and the separateness of tastes. Thai food is often spicy, hot and high in sodium due to the use of hot peppers and salt preserved sauces. Koreans make "Kimchee" a fermented cabbage relish that is marinated in salt water and peppers in October and November for use daily all

year long. Tofu, a bean curd made with calcium carbonate supplies some of the needed calcium with additional calcium needs being met by soy milk and fish bones.

Dietary Modification:

The five leading causes of death in the US in 2000 for Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders were:

1. Cancer
2. Heart disease
3. Stroke
4. Unintentional injuries
5. Chronic lower respiratory disease

Generally, the Asian American

diet is well balanced, offers variety and is nutrient dense. Sodium intake is high and can be lowered by replacing salted seasonings with fresh herbs such as garlic, basil and lemongrass. The addition of American foods, especially the sweet roll, sweetened cereal and high saturated fat meats at breakfast and lunch, should be limited if diabetes or weight control is a concern. Some research has indicated an association between the high intake of sodium and chili peppers in addition to a low intake of vitamins A and C with the high incidence of stomach, liver and esophageal cancer in the Korean American population. Lactose intolerance is common in the Asian community. Efforts should be made to find calcium sources such as calcium fortified orange juice, tofu, and soy milk. If iron deficiency anemia is a concern, adding more meat, fish, eggs and poultry to each meal will increase iron, protein and calorie intake.

What foods "make you healthy?"

It is not always the foods that make it difficult for members of a culturally diverse community to understand the concept of a healthy diet, but the rituals and beliefs that are their foundation of health knowledge. In some Hispanic communities, health is considered a gift from a deity and illness is almost always due to outside forces. The African American and Asian communities view health more as a personal responsibility. In fact, in the Asian community, health is a responsibility one has to the family and society.

The traditional Hispanic and Asian communities describe illness as a dichotomy of either hot or cold, which influences which food should be eaten. When one suffers from a "hot" condition such as pregnancy in the Hispanic community, foods such as meat, considered to be a "hot" food, are avoided. In the Asian community seaweed is traditionally eaten by Korean women after pregnancy to cleanse the blood and to balance the "hot" state of pregnancy. Chinese culture believes there is a positive energy and a negative energy associated with all things in the universe. Yin

represents the negative energy and yang the positive energy. Foods belong to either the yin or "cold" foods including bitter melon, winter melon, Chinese green, mustard green, water crest, Napa Cabbage, bean sprouts, cilantro, oranges, watermelon, bananas, water chestnuts, ice cream, clams, oysters. When these foods are eaten without the balancing yang or "hot" foods the result may include; diarrhea, stomach ache, dizziness, weakness, and coldness. Foods that are considered "yang" are chili pepper, onion, curry, cabbage, eggplant, pineapple, mango, peanuts, beef, turkey, shrimp, crab, French fries, fried chicken, pizza, cherry and garlic. Without balance of a yin food, consumption of yang foods can lead to rashes, hives, pimples, nose bleeds, sore throat, gas, indigestion, constipation and redness of eyes. Only when intake of yin and yang are balanced is health achieved.

Members of the African American community may conform to the health philosophy of high and low blood. Health is only achieved when blood is in balance. High blood (which may be confused with high blood

pressure) is believed to be a condition when blood expands in volume or moves higher in the body, usually to the head. Eating rich foods or foods red in color, especially red meat including pork are felt to be the cause of high blood. Symptoms of high blood include dizziness, headache, weakness, and vision problems. Some African Americans will treat high blood with a blood thinner such as vinegar, garlic or pickles. Low blood, is caused by eating too many acidic foods. Symptoms of low blood are similar to anemia and treatment is to thicken the blood with rich foods and red meats.

Fatness in the African American community is equated with prosperity and is also appreciated in children in the Mexican American community.

In these traditional cultures a diagnosis of illness may be interpreted as a food imbalance rather than a metabolic condition. Preconceptions that categorize foods should be discussed before dietary intake patterns can be established and individualized.

Food May Not Be *Just Nourishment*

Nowhere is the need for tailored health messages more evident than in meal planning. We all develop tastes and eating patterns that reflect the environmental influences which have shaped our lives. These tastes and eating patterns are often more similar to others who share our cultural experience regardless of where we currently live or our current lifestyle. Many of our favorite foods are ones we experienced in childhood. In fact, it is not surprising that when one experiences stress, such as ill health, we seek comfort from food. Food is often our only tie to the fond memories of childhood. Food may symbolize love and unity with a family or group. It can be used show one's independence as when a teen chooses "socially acceptable fast food" rather than home cooked meals. In today's modern technological society, many fear the loss of tradition and therefore use food and food rituals to preserve their cultural affiliations. Familiar foods can offer reassurance that we are still the same person as when life was safe and that the pleasures of yesterday are not completely lost.

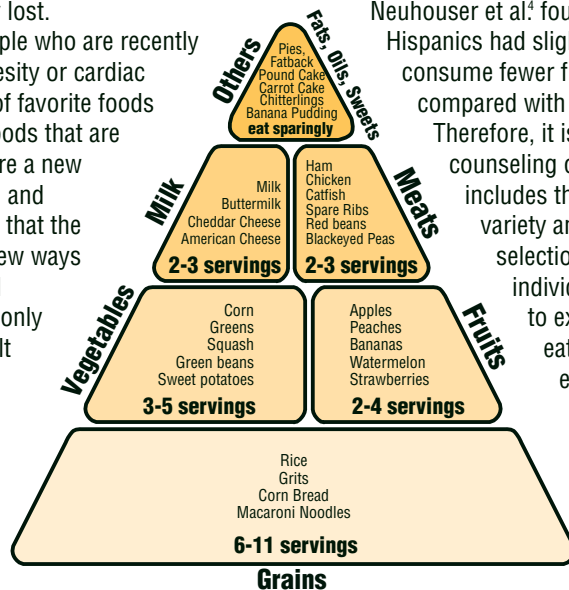
Another fear is that of people who are recently diagnosed with diabetes, obesity or cardiac disease. They fear the loss of favorite foods and being expected to eat foods that are unfamiliar or ones that require a new understanding of purchasing and cooking methods. Assuming that the individual can easily adopt new ways that coincide with a standard American eating pattern can only add to their burden and result in low adherence rates and mutual frustration. For example, traditional Mexican American meals often consist of mixed

dishes rather than a specific serving of grains, vegetables and meat. It would be difficult for a Mexican American to interpret a meal pattern that suggests limited servings of each food group.

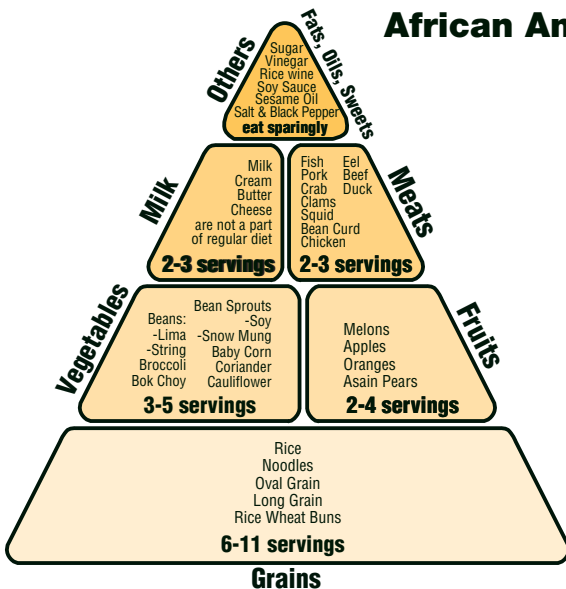
The degree of acculturation or the extent to which mainstream customs, beliefs and practices are adopted by immigrants influences the food pattern one follows. Liou and Contento³ found the degree of acculturation had an inverse relationship with habitual eating behavior. The less acculturated to mainstream American ways, the stronger influence habit had on food choice in a population of 600 Chinese Americans living in New York City. This finding indicates that in the case of recent immigrants, their food patterns may be difficult to change. Understanding culturally specific communication styles and cultural beliefs and practices will be necessary to accomplish behavior change with the least acculturated individuals. As they and their families begin to acculturate into the majority society, their food choices are often not healthy ones.

Neuhouser et al⁴ found that highly acculturated Hispanics had slightly greater fat intakes and consume fewer fruits and vegetables compared with less acculturated Hispanics.

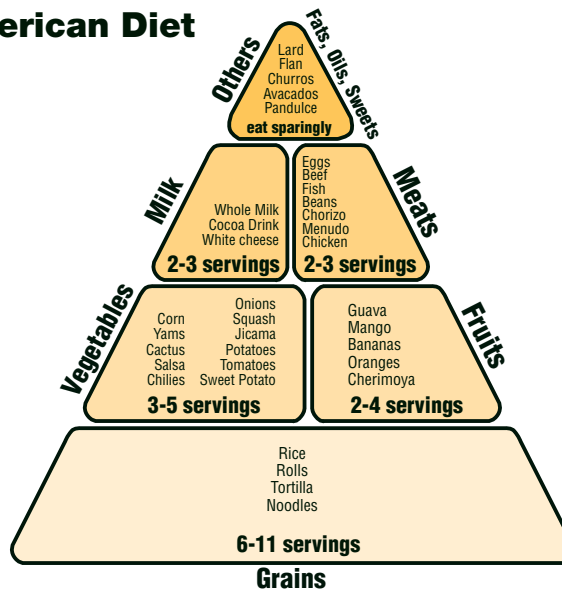
Therefore, it is important to provide counseling on dietary practice that includes the principles of balance, variety and moderation based on food selections that are familiar to the individual, especially as they begin to experiment with Americanized eating habits. The following ethnically appropriate food guide pyramids can be used as a starting point to provide dietary instruction.



African American Diet



Asian American Diet



Mexican American Diet

realities

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

The first step to appreciating another culture's values is to assess one's own value system and appreciate the differences. Keeping an open mind about what motivates eating behavior is essential when providing nutrition counseling and health advice. If you have been raised to think of food as nourishment for your bodily needs then it is likely that you will seek food that provides the most nourishment. However, if food is viewed by your culture as a tool to balance personality flaws or health to be predetermined by a deity, then you might not consider nutrient density as important.

Each individual must be treated as an individual and no general assumptions can be made solely on their membership in an ethnic culture however, understanding certain common ethnic philosophies may help overcome some of the barriers to communication. The table below lists some differences in cultural values of selected ethnic groups. Regardless of the culture, offering appropriate and positive health messages in a manner that is comfortable for the individual will be a major step toward adoption of health advice and eventual behavioral change.

Value	White American	African American	Asian American	Mexican American
World view	Personal Control, Materialism, Mastery over Nature	Fate, Spirituality, Harmony with Nature	Fate, Spirituality, Harmony with Nature	Fate, Spirituality, Harmony with Nature
Time orientation	Future	Present	Past-Present	Past-Present
People Relations	Individual	Kinship	Kinship	Kinship
Eye Contact	Direct	Direct when speaking, less when listening	Fleeting	Indirect
Conversational Distance	Arm's length	Closer than white's	Farther than white's	Closer than white's
Self-disclosure	Self-disclosure	Less than white's, more than Asian's	Modest, not open to strangers	Not open to strangers
Family Relationship	Nuclear, egalitarian	Kinship network, often matriarchal	Extended patriarchal	Extended patriarchal
Time perception	Punctual	Punctual	Flexible, Chinese and Japanese more punctual	Flexible
Verbal Communication	Interrupt frequently, speak loudly, fast rate	Interrupt, affective, emotional	Non-confrontational, self deprecating	Non-confrontational, speak softly

Jones and Darling, *Ethnic Foodways in Minnesota, Handbook of Food and Wellness across Cultures*. www.agricola.umn.edu/foodways/



Executive Editor:

Donald J. McNamara, Ph.D.

Writer:

Marcia D. Greenblum, M.S., R.D.



1050 17th Street, NW Suite 560
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 833-8850 Fax: (202) 463-0102
e-mail: enc@enc-online.org

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