



HYG-5252-95-R10

# Cultural Diversity: Eating in America Appalachian

**T**he formal definition of an Appalachian is anyone born in the federally designated Appalachian region or anyone whose ancestors were born there.

Appalachia extends as far south as Georgia to as far north as New York. In Ohio, counties in the south and southeastern part of the state are included.

Because of the migration of workers into larger industrial areas, some counties not officially in Appalachia may have a sizable number of residents whose roots are in Appalachia.

## Food Habits and Their Relationships to Dietary Guidelines

The mountain tradition is that food should be unpretentious, solid, and filling. The typical Appalachian diet could be rated fairly good in variety. Because many people from the region still garden, variety improves during the summer with readily available produce.

The Appalachian diet tends to be high in fat. Fried foods, gravies, sauces, and fattier meats are often included in daily meals. The overuse of salt may also be a problem.

## Eating Practices, Food Preferences, and Food Preparation Techniques

Beef, pork, chicken, fish, and wild game are all enjoyed and prepared in many ways. Bread in some form is served at nearly every meal.

Vegetables were once a big part of Appalachian meals. But, as with most Americans, this pattern has changed over time. One survey of southeastern Ohio residents showed that fruits and vegetables were consumed an average of 17 times per week. This is better than the average of 15.2 times per week in Ohio's urban areas, but lower than the national average of 23.8 times per week.

When vegetables are included in meals in Appalachia, favorites tend to be green beans, cabbage, turnips, beets, garden greens, tomatoes, onions, and carrots. In some areas, potatoes are eaten at nearly every meal.

The favored preparation techniques are fried, stewed, roasted, or baked. Casseroles are not really a favorite, but are becoming more accepted. Stir-frying would not be as familiar.

## Teaching Implications

An effective teaching strategy may be to relate healthy eating to the overall benefit of the children in the family. Children are highly valued in Appalachian families. If adults select healthier foods or preparation techniques for the sake of the children, the adults themselves might also begin to eat healthier.

As with many of us, change is sometimes difficult to accept. This is also true of Appalachian audiences. Try teaching the concept of cutting down, not out, or cutting down gradually. For instance, suggest

changing from whole milk to two percent to one percent. This would meet with more acceptance than telling the audience to switch from whole milk to skim milk.

Substituting foods or preparation techniques would be more accepted as well. For instance, suggest that instead of frying chicken, family members try a recipe for oven-fried chicken with the skin removed.

Because dried beans and peas are popular, encourage families to continue to eat these high-fiber foods instead of high-fat meats. Because quite a few people in the Appalachian community still garden, classes to update food preservation techniques would be useful.

### Customs and Family Traditions

Breastfeeding is an acceptable practice in the Appalachian community, but not nearly as many young mothers adopt this method of feeding their babies as nutrition specialists would like. Also, the recommendation to hold off feeding infants solid foods until five to six months of age is hard for this group to accept.

Sunday dinner was, and to some degree, still is a special meal. A typical “big” dinner might include several different meats, five or six vegetables, gravy, biscuits, pickles, preserves, pies or custards, coffee, and milk.

The typical American holidays are celebrated with food, friends, family, and fun.

### Cultural Diversity: Eating in America

Cultural diversity is a major issue in American eating. To fully understand the impact cultures play in American nutrition, one must study both food and culture.

This fact sheet on the Appalachian culture is one of a series of nine developed to address cultural diversity in American eating.

This fact sheet is designed as an awareness tool for a novice working with a cultural group previously unknown to them. Given the nature of the variations that exist in each cultural group (i.e. socio-economic status, religion, age, education, social class, location, length of time in the United States, and location of origin) caution needs to be taken not to generalize or imply that these characteristics apply to all individuals of a cultural group. This fact sheet was designed primarily for use in northeastern Ohio, but may stimulate awareness of differences in these cultural groups in other parts of the country. The goal of this fact sheet is to assist a novice educator in reducing any cultural barriers that may inhibit education. The author strongly recommends continued reading and additional research into the cultural groups in which you work.

Additional resources addressing cultural diversity in nutrition education:

- *Cross-Cultural Counseling: A Guide for Nutrition and Health Counselors* (FNS 250). U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Kittler, P., and Schuer, K. (1989). *Food and Culture in America*. Van Nostrand & Reinhold, 1989.
- *Nutrition, Food, and Culture*. National Livestock and Meat Board, Chicago, Illinois.

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