



FACT SHEET

Family and Consumer Sciences

HYG-5253-95-R10

Cultural Diversity: Eating in America Asian

Confucius said, “A man cannot be too serious about his eating, for food is the force that binds society together.” This statement summarizes the importance of food in the Asian culture. Preparation is meticulous, and consumption is ceremonious and deliberate. Two key elements draw the diverse cultures of the Asian region together: (1) the composition of meals (emphasis on vegetables and rice, relatively little meat); and (2) cooking techniques.

Description of Region

Asian-Americans have emigrated from the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Korea, and Japan. The religions they practice include Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto (Japanese only). A large number of native Filipinos are Roman Catholic. The Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong cultures are discussed in separate fact sheets.

Food Habits and Their Relationships to Dietary Guidelines

Most Asians living in America adhere to a traditional Asian diet interspersed with American foods, particularly breads and cereals. Dairy products are not consumed in sufficient quantity, except for ice cream. Calcium is consumed through tofu and small fish (bones eaten). Fish, pork, and poultry comprise the main proteins. Significant amounts of nuts and

dried beans are also eaten. Vegetables and fruits make up a large part of their food intake. Rice is the mainstay of the diet and is commonly eaten at every meal.

Eating Practices, Food Preferences, and Food Preparation Techniques

A typical day's menu might include:

- **Breakfast**—hot cereal, bread, fruit juice, soy milk, fruit, nuts, rice
- **Lunch**—rice or bread with vegetables or fruits
- **Dinner**—rice, vegetable soup mixed with tofu, vegetables, fish, or meat

Thai food is generally spicy, hot, and high in sodium. Hot peppers are used daily.

The Japanese are very concerned about the visual appeal of the food and the “separateness” of the foods and tastes. Garlic and hot pepper are not common ingredients.

Koreans make kimchee in October or November for use throughout the winter. Kimchee is cabbage marinated in salt water, layered with peppers and spices in crockery, and left to ferment through November and December. Kimchee is eaten with every meal.

Asian food preparation techniques include stir-frying, barbecuing, deep-frying, boiling, and steaming. All ingredients are carefully prepared (chopped, sliced, etc.) prior to starting the cooking process.

Teaching Implications

Bowing is important, but most Asian-Americans will shake hands. Bowing is a gesture similar to waving.

The elderly, children, and pregnant women are held in high esteem.

Most Japanese women in the United States breast-feed their babies. Thai women usually breastfeed their children up to age two. Many Korean parents bottle-feed their babies. New Korean mothers eat seaweed soup for the first month after delivery; the soup is believed to cleanse the blood.

Positive health factors related to diet include low incidence of heart disease, bowel cancer, and breast cancer.

Major diet-related diseases or concerns include stomach cancer and lactose intolerance.

Customs and Family Traditions

New Year's Day is the major holiday of the year. It is generally the only holiday that work days are taken as vacation. Asian clients tend to use American holiday breaks to travel.

Summary

Because of the diverse cultures within the Asian region, specific cultural customs should be addressed when programs are arranged.

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 Asian 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. socioeconomic 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.

References

Individual and group interviews conducted with Asian groups: Richland County.

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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