Unit 9 Diversity of Food Choices
Lesson 2: Diversity in Food Choices

"If we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity"¹
Matthew Arnold (1882-88) British poet and critic. Literature and Dogma, Preface.

Introduction
Our Williams’ text discusses how the growth in ethnic and racial diversity in the United States has led to a wide diversity of cultural and ethnic food patterns. (2007)² This lesson examines cultural diversity by looking at how Americans eat from a number of specific cultural, ethnic and racial group perspectives.

- African American
- Amish
- Appalachian
- Asian
- Islamic
- Hmong
- Judaic
- Mexican American
- Middle Eastern
- Puerto Rican
- Vegetarians
- Vietnamese

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” (Ohio State University, n.d.)³ As a result, the Ohio State University developed a series of nine fact sheets to address cultural diversity in American eating for specific groups.

African American

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The present day African-American population, like many other ethnic groups, is several generations removed from their original land. Thus many practices and habits have been lost, dropped, simulated, or modified. The greatest influence on many African-American families is the lifestyle of their parents or grandparents who lived in the southern United States. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Acceptable Nomenclature

Acceptable nomenclature for this cultural group include African-American, Black Americans, or People-of-Color. People-of-Color is preferred by many when addressing groups or discussing issues that affect several ethnic groups. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines

Historically, African-American rites revolved around food. The society is based on religious ceremonies, feasting, cooking, and raising food. The popular term for African-American cooking is "soul food." Many of these foods are rich in nutrients, as found in collard greens and other leafy green and yellow vegetables, legumes, beans, rice, and potatoes. Other parts of the diet, however, are low in fiber, calcium, potassium, and high in fat. With high incidence of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity, some African-Americans have paid a high price for this lifestyle. Economically disadvantaged families may have no other choice but to eat what is available at low cost. Fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat, and seafood are not as readily available at low cost. The presenter or educator may want to discuss ways of obtaining quality foods despite economic limitations, such as growing small gardens in community sites; shopping at roadside garden markets; shopping at large supermarkets rather than small corner stores; developing budgeting clubs and food co-ops; and participating in food bank programs. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Eating Practices, Food Preferences and Food Preparation Techniques

Common ways for African-Americans to prepare food include frying, barbecuing, and serving foods with gravy and sauces. Home-baked cakes and pies are also common. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Custom and Family Traditions

Many African-Americans are Protestant and have no specific food restrictions. However, a large number of families are members of religious groups that may have some restrictions

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or dietary preferences. These may include Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others. This should be discussed openly. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Special Holidays**

A large selection and variety of food is prepared and much attention is given to individual's favorite dishes. Besides all the formal and traditional American occasions and holidays, a large number of African-Americans observe and celebrate Kwanza, an African-American cultural holiday created by Dr. Maulana Karenga of Southern California in 1965. Kwanza is celebrated December 26 through January 1. Karamu, held on January 31, is celebrated with ceremonies, a buffet, and festive attire.

Some African-American churches frown on wearing slacks and shorts in the worship area or sanctuary, though wearing them is acceptable in the recreation area. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Amish**

The Amish are often referred to as the plain people, known for their unadorned style of dress, horse-drawn vehicles and family-centered lifestyle. A strong faith in God and church traditions determine their ways. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Ohio has the largest settlement of Amish in the United States; Pennsylvania ranks second and Indiana ranks third. The largest communities in Ohio are in Holmes, Wayne, Ashland and Geauga counties. Each of the groups within the Amish culture—Old Order Amish, New Order Amish, Mennonite, Beachy Amish, "Swiss" Mennonites, or Swartzentruber Amish, for example—have their own set of rules about what is acceptable from the world around them. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines**

Eating habits vary among the Amish depending on where they live, the type of work they do, and the mode of transportation they use. Traditionally the Amish community has been farm based with families growing or raising most of their own food and traveling by horse and buggy. This pattern is changing in urban areas, however, because of the scarcity of land and hazards of horse-and-buggy travel. Many Amish are leaving their farms, and gardens are becoming smaller.

Most Amish, especially those who still tend large gardens and orchards, eat a variety of foods. Because much of their work is physically demanding, many are not concerned about

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reducing the amount of fat in their diets. Those with access to motorized transportation buy more high-fat snack foods and eat out in restaurants more often than those who travel by horse and buggy.

Breads and cereals are usually made from whole grains and served often. In some families, cakes and cookies are available at most meals; in others sweets are limited.

High cholesterol and blood pressure may be a concern. However, because the Amish do not visit the doctor often, many ailments are not detected until a serious problem arises. The Amish do not carry health insurance or accept any type of public assistance. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Eating Practices, Food Preferences and Food Preparation Techniques

Most Amish do not have electricity in their homes. For cooking, many use either wood or kerosene oil stoves; they cool their food in ice boxes, spring houses, or their basements. A minority have freezers.

The Amish prepare most of their food from scratch, but some also use mixes and instant foods. They preserve all of their own fruits and vegetables and much of their meat by canning. Homemade bologna is popular and is usually made without the casing. Some Amish will occasionally purchase frozen foods as a change of taste or as a treat. Many rural families have their own milk cow and make cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. Those near urban areas usually buy these items at the supermarket or cheese houses.

Many farm families eat cornmeal mush - made from oven-roasted field corn - for breakfast. Eggs and cooked cereal are other typical breakfast foods. Fruits or juice may be included. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

The main meal of the day typically consists of noodles, macaroni, or potatoes; meat, which is often fried; and canned vegetables. Homemade or supermarket-bought bread is served at every meal. The lighter meal commonly consists of soup, cheese or bologna, and fruit. Snacks are usually apples, cookies, or leftovers. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Customs and Family Traditions

Family life is extremely important to the Amish; many have large families (10 or more children). Children are viewed as gifts from God. Many women breastfeed their babies; others bottle-feed. Many Amish make their own baby food by grinding a portion of the family's meal. Some will purchase instant baby cereals. Milk is not always served to the children as a beverage, but is used on cereals and in cakes and cookies.

Because of their lack of exposure to the outside world (including radio, television, and magazines), Amish children are influenced solely by their parents' and extended family's eating habits. However, as more young people are forced to seek jobs in the outside community, their food experiences and traditions are changing.

Traditions are important to the Amish, but kept simple compared with "English" (the term Amish people use to describe the non-Amish) standards. Many Amish hold church services and weddings in their homes. The meals that accompany these events are special times for socializing. The Amish celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and birthdays with traditional foods, but with few decorations or gifts. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Appalachian**

The formal definition of an Appalachian is any one 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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**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

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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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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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. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Summary

Because of the diverse cultures within the Asian region, specific cultural customs should be addressed when programs are arranged. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Hmong

The Hmong people are from rural mountain areas in Laos. They are divided into clans or tribes that share the same paternal ancestry. Each clan has a leader who oversees all relations and a shaman (wise man/medicine man) who deals with spiritual and physical problems. Hmong education is oral, which leads many Americans to mislabel them as illiterate. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines

The Hmong staple food is white rice. Their diet is enhanced by a variety of vegetables, fish, meat, and traditional spices. They eat three meals a day. Snacking is not part of their native culture. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Typical daily meals might include:

- Breakfast-light soup with rice, pumpkin, vegetables, chicken, or pork (eaten very early)
- Lunch-nonglutinous rice, fried or steamed meat, pork, chicken, or beef (eaten at 12:00 noon or before)

Dinner—same as lunch (eaten late evening)

Most of a Hmong's daily calories are from the carbohydrates/grain group. Native vegetables are also consumed in large amounts. The Hmong diet could be enhanced with the addition of a variety of inexpensive, available vegetables. Meats and fish are used in small amounts as enhancements. The amounts are sufficient, however, to provide ample protein. Popular fruits are bananas, mangos, pineapples, coconuts, lichees, and jackfruit. As with vegetables,
additional varieties of fruit could enhance the Hmong diet. In particular, citrus fruits should be emphasized for their vitamin C content.

Fresh milk and cheese are typically unavailable to Hmongs in their native country. This, along with lactose intolerance, discourages the consumption of dairy products. Overall fat content in the diet is low. Relatively few households in Laos eat sweets. Most are not equipped with ovens to bake desserts. A steamed rice cake may be eaten occasionally. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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

Hmong food is usually home grown. Meats are usually fresh, home butchered, and shared among clan members to keep storage time short.

Hmong meals are served in a communal style. Food is placed (and replenished) in the middle of the table, and each person eats from the center with a spoon or fork. Using fingers to eat is impolite.

Cooking methods include stir-frying, boiling, steaming, and roasting over an open fire. Vegetable oils and pork fat are the principal fats used in cooking. Food is usually chopped in uniform pieces before cooking.

Seasonings are an essential aspect of Hmong cooking. Fish sauce and soy sauce, both of which are high in sodium, replace table salt. Hot peppers, ginger, garlic, coriander, coconut, and lemon grass contribute to the robust flavor. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Customs and Family Traditions**

Hmongs follow an animist religion. They believe in spirits in all places and every aspect of life.

Hmongs also have close family and clan relationships. The clan leader and the shaman are important and respected. Clans will move to the same area in the United States to keep that closeness. Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, North Carolina, and California have large clan groups. The shaman is similar to a psychologist, doctor, and minister. It is very important to gain his respect.

Mothers nurse infants for one to two years. An infant’s first solid food is rice flour and water made into a gruel. This may be started as early as one month but other foods are not

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introduced until one year. During pregnancy and lactation many women do not increase their caloric intake. Many do not include milk in their diet. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Conclusion**

The Hmong people have experienced an enormous cultural change in their move to the United States. No longer can they have the fresh variety of food available in their homeland. Because they were orally educated, a trip to the grocery store is quite difficult. The picture on labels, for example, do not necessarily reflect the contents of the package and are often misleading.

The Hmong mother is caught between her husband who wants homeland cooking and her children who are becoming "Americanized" and expect her to cook American meals. Hmong women are best taught by hands-on lessons. They are a willing group of learners. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Islam**

According to Schlenker and Long, "Muslim dietary laws are derived from Islamic teachings in the Koran. Food is considered to be a form of worship, and Muslims are urged to avoid self-indulgence. The Koran offers guidance for particular foods as follows" (2008, page 6, Diversity in Food Patterns).

- Milk products: permitted at all times
- Fruits and vegetables: permitted unless fermented or poisonous
- Breads and cereals: permitted unless contaminated or harmful
- Meats: pork is strictly forbidden, all other land animals and seafood permitted
- Alcohol: strictly forbidden

**Judaism**

According to Schlenker and Long, "For many groups religious laws set standards for the foods to be eaten and their methods of operation" (2008, page 6, Diversity in Food Patterns).

The observance of Jewish food laws differs among the three groups within Judaism: 1) the Orthodox follow a strict observance, (2) the Conservative are less strict, and (3) the Reformed have the least emphasis on food laws. The body of dietary laws is called the *Rules of Kashruth*.

**The Meaning of Kosher**

Foods selected and prepared according to the *Rules of Kashruth* laws are call kosher, from the Hebrew word meaning "fit or proper." Jewish dietary laws govern the slaughter,
preparation, and serving of meat, the combining of meat and milk, and the eating of fish and eggs with the following food restrictions.

- Meat: Pork is forbidden
- Meat and milk: Meat and milk may not be combined
- Fish: Fish with fins and scales are allowed in the diet
- Eggs: Eggs may be eaten with either meat or dairy foods but eggs with blood must be discarded

(Schlenker and Long, 2007, page 6)\(^{34}\)

**Mexican American**

In the United States Mexican-Americans comprise 60 percent of the Hispanic/Latino population. Mexicans live predominantly in California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. The difference between Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Latin American countries includes 500 years of separate history, as well as entirely different native populations that were present when the Spaniards arrived. Thus, the Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Latin American cultures each have a completely different concept of what foods are appropriate and what these foods are called. (Ohio State University, n.d.)\(^{35}\)

**Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines**

The Mexican diet of today is rich in a variety of foods and dishes that represent a blend of pre-Columbian, Spanish, French, and more recently, American culture. The typical Mexican diet is rich in complex carbohydrates, which are provided mainly by corn and corn products, beans, rice, and breads. The typical Mexican diet contains an adequate amount of protein in the forms of beans, eggs, fish and shellfish, and a variety of meats, including beef, pork, poultry, and goat. Because of the extensive use of frying as a cooking method, the Mexican diet is also high in fat. The nutrients most likely to be inadequately provided are calcium, iron, vitamin A, folacin, and vitamin C. (Ohio State University, n.d.)\(^{36}\)

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

Traditionally, Mexicans ate four or five meals daily. The foods eaten varied with factors such as income, education, urbanization, geographic region, and family customs. The extent to which the traditional Mexican meal pattern continues among Mexicans in the United States has not been systematically studied. The three-meal pattern prevails, although whether or not the major meal of the day occurs in mid-afternoon is unclear. The daily meal pattern in

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the typical Mexican-American home varies according to the availability of traditional foods and the degree of assimilation into American society. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

With emigration to the United States, major changes occur in the Mexican-American’s diet. Healthy changes include a moderate increase in the consumption of milk, vegetables, and fruits, and a large decrease in the consumption of lard and Mexican cream. The introduction of salads and cooked vegetables has increased the use of fats, such as salad dressings, margarine, and butter. Other less healthy changes include a severe decline in the consumption of traditional fruit-based beverages in favor of high-sugar drinks. Consumption of inexpensive sources of complex carbohydrates, such as beans and rice, also has decreased as a result of acculturation. In addition to the negative impact on the health of this population, these dietary changes also may adversely affect the family’s budget when low-priced foods are replaced with more expensive ones. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Clinical studies have consistently reported a high prevalence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, dental caries, and over/under nutrition in the Mexican-American population. Overweight and obesity are higher in Hispanic women and children. Research also indicates that Mexicans in the United States eat more meat and saturated fats than Anglos, and use fewer low-fat dairy products. Mexicans also are less likely to recognize high-fat foods. Approximately 10 to 12 percent of Mexican-American adults have diabetes, with 95 percent of those having the non-insulin-dependent type. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Customs and Family Traditions**

The family unit is the single most important social unit in the life of Hispanics. Family responsibilities come before all other responsibilities. Gender differentiation and male dominance are issues to consider while working with Hispanic families. The father is the leader of the family, and the mother runs the household, shops, and prepares the food. The traditional concepts of manhood and womanhood, however, appear to be changing toward a more egalitarian model with increased exposure to American society. The majority of Mexicans are Roman Catholic. Evangelical Protestantism is a fast-growing religion, especially among immigrants. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Summary**

The health care provider may intervene with Hispanic clients and communities in culturally sensitive ways, which includes viewing culture as an enabler rather than a resistant force.

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incorporating cultural beliefs into the plans of care, stressing familialism, and taking time for pleasant conversation. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Middle Eastern**

The countries of the Middle East include Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey. Although the cuisines of Middle Eastern countries are similar, each culture has distinctly different eating practices, food preferences, and food preparation techniques. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

Thousands of Middle Easterners live in the United States. Middle Easterners emigrate for political reasons, advanced schooling, and because of the prior emigration of other family members. The many students and professionals who emigrate from these countries often come from affluent families and are cosmopolitan in their food habits. As with other immigrant groups, the length of stay in the United States correlates with the degree of Americanization of the diet. Traditional dishes tend to be prepared and eaten for special occasions. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines**

Foods common among all of the Middle Eastern cuisines include dates, olives, wheat, rice, legumes, and lamb. Bread typically accompanies each meal. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Common food consumption includes the following:**

- **Dairy Products**
  
  Most dairy products are eaten in fermented forms, such as yogurt and cheese. Whole milk is used in desserts and puddings. Feta cheese is the most commonly consumed cheese.

- **Meats**
  
  Lamb is the most widely eaten meat. Pork is eaten only by Christians and not by Muslims or Jews. Many Middle Easterners will not combine dairy products or shellfish with the meal. Kosher beef, kosher poultry, herring, lox, and sardines are also common foods. Legumes such as black beans, chick peas (garbanzo beans), lentils, navy beans, and red beans are used in many dishes.

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• **Breads and Cereals**

Some form of wheat or rice accompanies each meal. Matzoh, unleavened bread, and pita bread are common and readily available in American food markets. Filo dough, which is used to make baklava, is also used in many dishes.

• **Fruits**

Fruits tend to be eaten as dessert or as snacks. Fresh fruit is preferred. Fruits made into jams and compotes are eaten if fresh is not available. Lemons commonly are used for flavoring.

• **Vegetables**

Eggplant is the most commonly consumed vegetable. Fruit and vegetables are preferred raw or mixed in a salad. Many times vegetables are stuffed with rice or meats. Green and black olives are present in many dishes, and olive oil is most frequently used in food preparation.

(Ohio State University, n.d.)

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

Grilling, frying, grinding, and stewing are the most common ways of preparing meats. A whole, roasted lamb, or leg of lamb is a special dish prepared for festive gatherings. Spices and seasonings are essential in the preparation of Middle Eastern dishes. Common spices and herbs include dill, garlic, mint, cinnamon, oregano, parsley, and pepper. Olive oil is preferred in food preparation.

While Americanized Middle Easterners prefer an American-type breakfast and lunch, dinner is more traditional. Recipes have been altered to require less preparation time, less fat, and fewer spices.

**Customs and Family Traditions**

The Middle Eastern culture centers around a strong patriarchal family. This has lessened since their emigration to the United States but family ties are still strong.

Food is an integral part of family celebrations, special days of honor, and festivals. The Kosher dietary laws concerning selection, preparation, and eating of food remains influential in the Jewish religious and family life. The Jewish laws of Kashrut, or keeping Kosher, determine which foods are Kosher and non-Kosher.

Many ancient practices and rituals, handed down from generation to generation, are observed. Fasting from sunrise to sunset is a Muslim religious obligation practiced during Ramadan.

Body movement such as touch is allowed only between the same sex. Body language and eye contact remain an important tool in effective communication. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Puerto Rican**

The Puerto Rican culture includes people whose ancestors and possibly current extended family members are from the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico. Their original language is Spanish. Under Spanish rule and then under American rule, Puerto Rico has never been an independent nation. Puerto Ricans are American citizens and can legally enter and leave the mainland. Migration flows circularly between the island of Puerto Rico and the mainland. Because of this circular migration, elements of both cultures thrive in both places, and a specific Puerto Rican "cultural type" is difficult to describe. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines**

The typical Puerto Rican diet has many positive aspects. This diet is high in complex carbohydrates such as breads, cereals, soda crackers, rice, and corn meal.

A typical diet also includes some calcium and milk products. Adult women will drink milk in cafe con leche (coffee with milk) and consume calcium in flan (custard).

Incomplete proteins, such as those as found in legumes, rice, and beans, are often eaten. Meats eaten include chicken, pork sausage, turkey, beef, pork chops, spare ribs, and marinated pork. Fish is eaten, but in quantities smaller than other meats. When available, viandas (starchy vegetables) are also included in the Puerto Rican diet. Viandas include plantains, green bananas, taniers, white and yellow sweet potatoes, and chayote squash. Lettuce salads with tomato are popular.

Increasing the calcium intake and the varieties of vegetables would improve the typical Puerto Rican diet. The diet is generally high in calories, complex carbohydrates, fats, and sodium.

Almost 70 percent of the food on the island of Puerto Rico is imported from the United States. Because of this the Puerto Rican diet - particularly the diets of younger generations - has become very Americanized. Favorite foods include pizza, hot dogs, canned spaghetti, cold cereal, and canned soups. Fast food restaurants are also popular. Some Puerto Rican families living on the mainland shift away from traditional dietary patterns. Others maintain their ethnic food patterns after living on the mainland several decades. Bilingual children can play a major role in promoting dietary changes and modifications. The population has a tendency toward high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes (three to five times higher than the general population), cancer, arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders, and obesity.

Nutritional objectives should involve: encouraging selection of foods from all food groups; drinking plenty of water; maintaining ideal body weight; encouraging the use of low-fat dairy products; encouraging the consumption of unsugared fruit juices; teaching a greater variety of preparation styles; and introducing a greater variety of vegetables. The

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population should also be discouraged from eating sugar and simple carbohydrates, and using excessive fats in cooking. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

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

Puerto Rican foods are not spicy like Mexican foods, but they do have a mild, distinctive taste. They frequently use a seasoning called Sazon, which is mostly MSG. Other common seasonings are annato (a yellow coloring similar to saffron), cilantro, and sofrito (a seasoning sauce used in cooking made from lean cured ham, onion, green pepper, cilantro, and garlic sauteed in oil). (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Custom Religions and Family Traditions**

Respect for family is critical in the Puerto Rican culture. Mothers and elders are adored and duty to the family, including the extended family, is essential. Family ties are strong. Families often gather for holidays, birthdays, and weddings. Machismo is a critical element of the society. Women usually make decisions on foods purchased and served. Traditionally meals are served when the entire family is together.

Breastfeeding is frequently practiced. Puerto Ricans believe breastfeeding is nourishing and creates bonding between mother and child. (Ohio State University, n.d.)

**Vegetarians**

Gail Frank discusses vegetarianism and possible health outcomes because “Vegetarians frequently experience lower mortality rates from chronic degenerative disease than non-vegetarians” (2008, page 215-217). In general a vegetarian diet supports healthy food choices, avoids use of alcohol or illicit drugs. In addition, a vegetarian diet is mainly composed of fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, seeds, and nuts. While eggs, dairy products may be used in a vegan’s diet, they also may be excluded.

Vegetarianism is commonly practiced in India, and it stems from religious beliefs of nonviolence toward animals and contributing to self-improvement and well-being. The lactovegetarian diet is the most common, then lactovovegetarian, and vegan diets are popular.

**Guidelines to Assist Vegetarians with Meal Planning**

**Vietnamese**

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The Vietnamese come from both remote agricultural and fast-paced urban areas of southeast Asia. Most Vietnamese practice Buddhism, but some practice Confucianism or Taoism.

**Food Habits and Their Relationship to Dietary Guidelines**

The basic food in Vietnam is dry, flaky rice supplemented with vegetables, eggs, and small amounts of meat and fish. Although similar to Chinese cooking, Vietnamese cooking uses little fat or oil for frying. "NuocMam" fish sauce is a principle ingredient in almost every Vietnamese dish. Vietnamese are fond of fruits - bananas, mangos, papayas, oranges, coconuts, and pineapple. They are accustomed to little milk and cheese, and many cannot produce the enzymes needed to properly digest dairy foods (lactose intolerance). They drink a large amount of hot green tea and coffee without adding sugar, milk, or lemon.

The Vietnamese have three meals a day with some snacking on fruits and soups.

**Breakfast** -(light) soup "pho," rice or rice noodles; thin slices of beef, chicken, or pork; bean sprouts; greens; green tea or green coffee; boiled eggs; and crusty bread

**Lunch and Dinner** -(both similar in food content, with smaller portions for dinner)-rice, fish, or meat; vegetable dish with NuocMam or fish sauce; tea or coffee

**Snacks** -fruits, clear soup

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

In their home country, Vietnamese either grow food or purchase it daily. There are few refrigerators. Teaching Vietnamese living in the United States proper food storage of perishable foods is important. Encourage home and community gardening as a source of native vegetables. Soybeans, mung beans, and peanuts are used extensively. New, inexpensive legumes should be introduced.

Chopsticks and small bowls are used for eating. Bowls are brought to the mouth to eat.

Vietnamese eat a wide variety of vegetables. Fruit is served as a dessert and snack. Encourage variety in their diet through introducing unfamiliar vegetables and fruits. Discourage low-nutrient foods such as soft drinks, candy, and chips.

**Customs and Family Traditions**

The Vietnamese family structure is paternal spanning three generations and is the chief source of social identity. The three generations live together in a single family house, the father upholding traditions and setting moral standards.

Vietnamese names are written in reverse order of American names: family - middle - personal. Nguyen Van Hai would be called Mr. Hai. Some have reversed name order to comply with American customs.

The calendar followed is a lunar one with Tet - or the Lunar New Year, which usually occurs in February - being the most important holiday and feast. Tet is considered everyone's birthday, and individual birthdays are not celebrated.
Pregnant women do not increase their caloric intake. Milk consumption is low or nonexistent during pregnancy and lactation. Infants are breastfed to about one year. Rice gruel (rice flour and water) is the only food introduced in the first year, sometimes as early as one month.

**Conclusion**

Even though Vietnamese immigrants range from farmers to urban dwellers, their move to the United States is one of enormous cultural change. They are a people of tradition yet are open to try new "American" ways. Unfamiliar with most of our grocery items, they not only need to be retaught [sic] words and techniques for their own cooking, but need a total introduction to American food culture.

**Summary**

American has been long thought of as a 'melting pot' because of the myriad of multicultural groups comprising the population. Immigrants bring a unique cultural perspective to America and their beliefs' and practices directly influence food choices and nutritional health status. Because of the diversity in food habits, beliefs’ and practices, nutrition educators must acquire knowledge by conducting research about the eating habits of each community they serve. Learning more about the habits, customs, religious and other influences on food choice helps nutrition educators to become culturally sensitive and culturally competent in delivering nutrition education to the communities they serve.