

HEALTHY EATING, INTERNATIONAL STYLE

When you think of American food, what do you think of? Apple pie, french fries, and hamburgers are just a few foods that we consider "American." Now think about the foods you eat when you go to Italian, Chinese, or Mexican restaurants. Why doesn't everybody eat the same types of foods?

The kinds of foods eaten in different nations depend upon the geography and climate of an area. The geography and climate of Scotland, for example, are perfect for growing oats and barley. In Mexico, on the other hand, the climate is right for growing *maize*, or corn. If people live by the seaside, they are likely to have a diet high in fish. But those living in the mountains may not have access to fresh seafood.

Cultural beliefs and traditions also play important parts in dietary practices. In India, for example, some people do not eat beef. Others will not eat garlic and onions. In some cultures, it is against tradition to eat pork.



Some foods that we would find unappealing have important nutritional value in other cultures. Some native people of the far north, for example, eat raw whale and seal fat. In the cold winter months, fresh fruits and vegetables are not available. Without the vitamin C this fat provides, the people might develop scurvy. If they cook the fat, the vitamin C is lost.

Some cultures include insects in their diets. This may sound unappetizing to us. However, the insects are an important source of protein and vitamins in the diet. Additionally, insects are plentiful, easy to find, and cheaper to raise than cattle or other livestock. There are hundreds of kinds of edible bugs. These include mealworms, crickets, beetles, cicadas, and ants.

FOOD CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD

Some nutritionists believe that Americans could have much healthier diets if we patterned our meals after some other cultures. Mediterranean, Asian, and Latin American cultures, for example, have lower intakes of red meat and higher intakes of grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Mediterranean Region

The Mediterranean region includes such areas as Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. Although different parts of the Mediterranean have their own distinct food styles, they all share some basic ingredients. Grains are an important part of Mediterranean diets. In Italy, for example, pasta is used in many recipes.

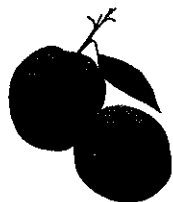
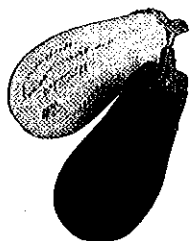
The Mediterranean diet has few animal fats. Instead olive oil is the main source of fat. Olive oil is mostly unsaturated fat, as opposed to animal fats, which are mostly saturated fats.

Nutritionists say that mono-unsaturated fats are healthier for humans than saturated fats are.

Other important parts of Mediterranean diets include breads, such fresh vegetables as artichokes and eggplants, and fruit. Red meat is eaten only a few times a month, while chicken and fish are eaten a few times a week.

Latin America

Latin America includes Mexico and countries in Central and South America. Grains, fruits, and vegetables are all important parts of many Latin American diets. The chief grain is maize. Potatoes, peanuts, and dry beans are other important sources of protein.



Fast Food Chains

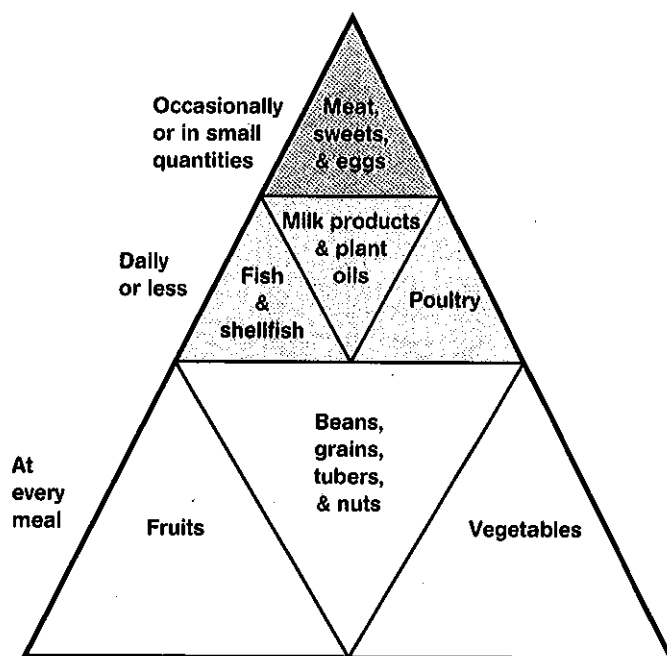
What do you do when you're on the run and need to eat a fast meal? Many of us stop into fast food restaurants. There are thousands of fast food restaurants in the United States. Fast food chains are quickly gaining in popularity around the world, too. In recent years, such countries as China and Russia have had chains spring up, especially in large towns and cities.

Fast food is not harmful to your health. However, you should be careful how much fast food you eat. Fast food meals are generally high in fat and sodium. They usually have few grains, fruits, or vegetables. Therefore, they are low in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. It does not hurt to have an occasional burger and fries. But it is more important to be concerned with a healthy, well balanced diet overall.

Many fast food chains are aware that people today are more health-conscious than ever. Some offer more healthy choices for those who want to eat more nutritious meals. The next time you visit a fast food restaurant, think about trying a meal that is lower in fat and higher in other nutrients.

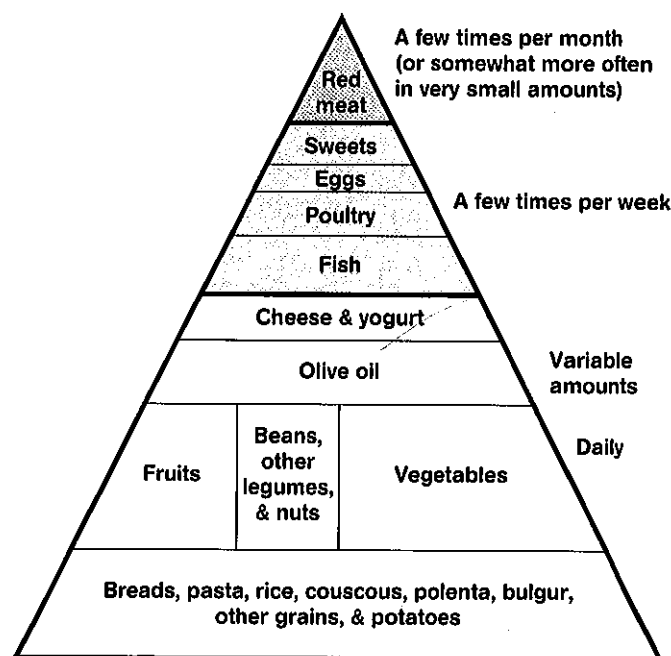
Much of the fat in many Latin American diets comes from such natural sources as fruits, nuts, and some high-fat vegetables like avocados. As with the Mediterranean diet, red meats are eaten only occasionally. Poultry and fish are eaten more regularly, perhaps a few times a week.

The Traditional Healthy Latin American Diet Pyramid



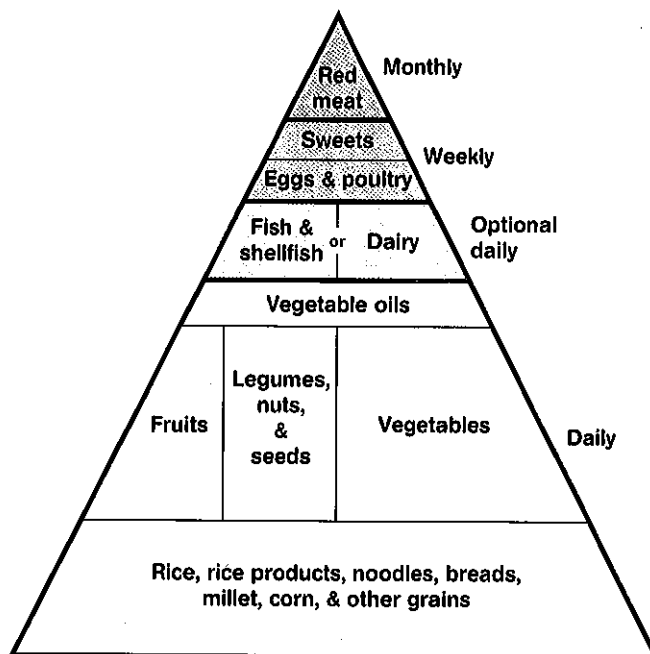
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The Traditional Healthy Mediterranean Diet Pyramid



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The Traditional Healthy Asian Diet Pyramid

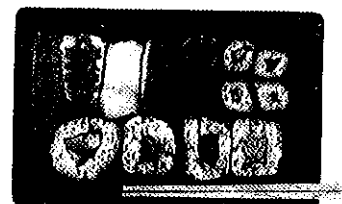


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Asia

Asia includes such countries as China, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and Korea. The Asian diet may be one of the healthiest. It is low in total fat and high in other nutrients. Rice is a feature in the Asian diet. This grain is a good source of carbohydrates, protein, fiber, minerals, and vitamins. People who live in Asia get from 25 percent to 80 percent of their total calories from rice each day. In China, the average person eats about 109 kilograms (243 pounds) of rice per year.

Other important ingredients in Asian diets include noodles and beans. They also include vegetables, nuts, and oils from these foods. Most Asian countries have no dairy products. There is also little red meat or pork eaten. People living near the sea have plenty of fresh fish in their diets.



America: Food from the Melting Pot

Before the arrival of colonists from Europe, the first Americans depended upon such staples as corn, beans, and squash. Native recipes often included these ingredients. Once the colonists did arrive, the Native Americans often taught them how to make use of these easy-to-grow ingredients. Such foods as corn bread, squash pie, and baked beans are examples of how settlers used these new foods.

Many of the foods that we have come to think of as important parts of an American diet today had their roots in countries far across the sea. That's because the United States is a nation of immigrants. The people who came from all over the world to make their homes here brought their food traditions and preferences with them. In many cases, such ethnic foods as lasagna, tacos, and egg rolls made their ways into the larger culture.

Breakfast around the World

What is your breakfast like? Compare a typical American breakfast to other breakfast meals around the world.

United States Orange juice, coffee, scrambled eggs, whole wheat toast with jam, bacon, home fries, slice of melon

China Rice, vegetables

Egypt Bean cakes with jam, eggs, pickles, cheese

France Coffee with milk, croissants with butter and jam

Greece Rolls, fresh fruit with yogurt, black coffee

Russia Tea, black bread, sausages, fried eggs, pickles

Turkey Soup, cheese pastry, wheat bread, black olives