

Exploring the Filipino Culture

Background

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelagic country in Southeast Asia, consisting of 7,641 islands with a hot, humid, tropical maritime climate.

The Philippines was under Spanish rule for over 300 years (1565-1898) and has a strong Spanish influence on food choices. In 1898, after the Spanish-American War, the Spanish ceded the Philippines to the U.S. Then, during World War II, the Japanese occupied the country. In 1946 the Philippines gained independence.



Traditions and Customs

The family is central to Philippine society. They maintain close relationships, and multigenerational living arrangements are common. Respect for authority is valued and honored. Sometimes, family members work abroad to support the family, called Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). They periodically send boxes full of non-perishable food, medicines, gifts, and more, called Balikbayan boxes, to family and friends back home.



Holidays and Celebrations

Public holidays are classified as regular or special. Festivals are mostly religious and Christianity is the dominant religion, including about 90% of the population. Islam is the second-largest religion. Harvest festivals occur during the harvest season, including Kadayawan and Pahiyas. The Christmas season begins as early as September, and Holy Week is observed by the Christian population. Many Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays during the lenten season or 6 weeks leading up to Easter.



Education and Literacy

Tagalog is the country's official language. English and Filipino languages are taught in schools.



Health Disparities

Most Filipinos who immigrate to the U.S. have an increased risk of heart disease, cerebrovascular diseases, cancer, iron deficiency anemia, and diabetes. There is a higher rate of lactose intolerance among Filipinos.

Traditional Food Practices

Food is prepared and served to be delicious, rich, and welcoming. Family and community gatherings are frequent with plenty of food and it is often frowned upon if the food provided to guests is refused. Boodle fights are a fun communal way of eating that entails a long table with lots of food placed on banana leaves. Filipinos usually eat three meals and two snacks daily. They believe food is the language of love. Dinner is an important time for the family to gather, share a meal, and discuss their day. Rice is a common food usually eaten with meals and used in savory and sweet dishes. Filipino dishes are often comprised on different animal parts to prevent food waste, such as oxtail, intestines, pig ears, and beef or pork blood. Filipinos tend to eat with only a fork and spoon and sometimes eat with their hands. Many Filipinos eat noodles on birthdays to celebrate a long life.



Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- WIC educators and counselors can encourage pregnant clients to pair non-meat foods with foods high in vitamin C to avoid iron deficiency anemia.
- Clients with gestational diabetes can be encouraged to reduce portion sizes if necessary.
- Postpartum clients can be encouraged to eat soup-based dishes for adequate hydration. It is a good time to explore the need for support or referral for mental health services.
- Families may need education and counseling on infant hunger cues and introducing iron-rich foods at 6 months of age. Families can be counseled to trust children's appetites and watch for fullness to avoid overfeeding.
- Be open-minded and respectful of the different ways Filipino cultural foods are prepared and cooked. Some ingredients may seem foreign but are considered typical within their culture.
- Because many Filipinos cook with high-sodium foods, educators and counselors can suggest limiting high-sodium foods and increasing fruits and vegetables.
- WIC educators and counselors can encourage clients and families to focus on enjoying food without shame or guilt and eating healthier choices while increasing physical activity.



References

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