

# FACT SHEET:

## Somali Food and Culture



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### Traditional Eating Patterns

- Family meals are common<sup>1</sup>
- Three meals a day: quraac [breakfast], qado [lunch] and casho [dinner]<sup>2-4</sup>
- Lunch is the main meal of the day, breakfast and dinner are light meals<sup>2-4</sup>
- Breakfast may consist of a sweet bread with honey or jam<sup>1-4</sup>
- Lunch and dinner may consist of meat, rice and vegetables<sup>2-5</sup>
- Meat is a staple of the diet<sup>2-5</sup>
- Meals are plated individually<sup>3</sup>
- Utensils are not usually used<sup>3</sup>
- Food is eaten with the right hand only<sup>3</sup>



### Somalia

#### Quick Facts

Location: East Africa; has the longest stretch of coastline on the African continent<sup>2,3,6,7</sup>

Official Language: Somali<sup>2,3,6,7</sup>

Ethnic Somalis make up 85 percent of the population<sup>2,3,6</sup>

Religion: majority are Sunni Muslim<sup>2,3,5-7</sup>

### Religious Influences

**Religion plays a big role in the life of the Somali people and so Islamic dietary practices decide what can and cannot be eaten.**<sup>1-7</sup>

- Halal foods are foods that are allowed such as plant foods and some animal foods if they conform to the Islamic prescribed method of slaughtering.<sup>1-6</sup>
- Haram foods are forbidden by the Islam religion and include pork, blood and blood products and animals not slaughtered in the proper manner (halal). This also includes no alcohol.<sup>1-6</sup> Gelatin is typically avoided as it may contain pork.<sup>1-4</sup>
- Observe Ramadan (ninth month of the lunar calendar) where they fast during the day and only eat at night—this lasts for 30 days.<sup>7</sup> Pregnant women, people who are ill and children under the age of 14 do not have to fast.<sup>7</sup>

### American Influences on the Somali Diet

Eating more fast food such as French fries and pizza<sup>1,2</sup>

Drinking more fruit juices and soda<sup>1,2</sup>

Eating snacks, especially high-fat snacks<sup>1,2</sup>

Store-bought breads or making anjera with pancake mix or all-purpose flour<sup>1,2</sup>

## Traditional Foods and Beverages<sup>1-5</sup>

- **Meat** is a staple of the diet (camel, goat and lamb are preferred but include beef, chicken and fish) – meats may be fried in ghee (clarified butter), grilled or broiled
- **Rice and/or pasta** are included with meat and chicken dishes, especially at lunch
- **Vegetables** - okra, bagal (similar to a radish), potatoes, carrots, peas, green peppers, spinach, garlic
- **Fruits** - mango, guava, bananas, dates, pears, oranges, apples
- **Anjera** – sorghum, teff or corn flour mixed with milk or water and possibly eggs – similar to a thin pancake
- **Malawa**- made with wheat flour, sugar, oil and eggs – similar to a pancake
- **Spices** such as turmeric, cumin, coriander, curry
- **Milk** – camel, goat and cow (camel is considered the best)
- **Black tea** – most common drink, with milk and a lot of sugar

\*\*raw, sliced banana is typically served with rice or pasta dishes

## Traditional Dishes<sup>1-5</sup>

**Otka** – camel meat dried and fried in butter and spices

**Ambola** – red beans, rice and salt served with sesame oil and sugar

**Iskudahkaris** – meat, vegetables, onions cooked in oil and rice and then water is added

**Sugo** – onion, garlic, spices, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, meat and oil and served with rice or spaghetti

**Sambosa/sambusa** – deep-fried filo pastry with meat and vegetables

**Fool** – pinto beans, tomatoes, onions and served with bread

**Baasto** – spaghetti with meat sauce and sometimes vegetables or a salad

**Halwa** – sugar, water, cornstarch, butter and spices are usually served during holidays and weddings

**Dates** are typically eaten during Ramadan when breaking the fast.

## Traditional Health Beliefs

- ❖ Traditional doctors use herbal medicine and other rituals such as fire burning and prayer<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ Certain conditions are believed to be caused by spirits<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ Breastfeeding is common in children up to 2 years old, but they believe colostrum is not healthy, so it is supplemented with camel, goat or cow's milk<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Tea increases breastmilk production<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Chicken injected with hormones is bad for the human heart<sup>1</sup>

### References:

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