

Fact Sheet: Food and Culture of Ukraine

Staple Foods^{1, 3, 4}



Bread

Rye with Sourdough



Protein

Pork | Fish



Hearty Root Vegetables

Beets | Cabbage | Potatoes



Fermented Dairy

Sour Cream | Kefir



Fresh Herbs

Dill | Parsley

Popular Dishes^{1, 2, 3, 4}



Borscht

[Hearty beet soup]
May include other vegetables and meat
Garnished with sour cream



Varenniki

[Dumplings filled with meat, cheese, potatoes or mushrooms]
Served with fried onions and sour cream



Salo

[Cured pork fat]
Popular snack
Symbolic of being well-fed, though not necessarily rich⁵
Can be smoked or spiced with garlic, pepper and paprika



Holubtsi

[Cabbage filled with meat and rice]
Served with tomato sauce

Holidays & Religion

- Around 85% of Ukrainians are Christian. Easter and Christmas are the major Christian holidays^{2,6,7}
- Many do not eat meat during Lent and eat fish or hearty vegetarian meals at this time.³

On *Sviaty Vechir* [Christmas Eve] a 12 dish meal is served, including⁷:

- *Kolach* [traditional bread]
- *Kutya* [cooked wheat with honey, poppy seeds and nuts]
- Fish dishes, mushrooms, dumplings
- Fruits and cakes



For Easter, Ukrainians serve²:

- Ham or roast pork
- Vegetable salads
- Borscht
- Cheesecake, tortes and other pastries



Traditional Eating Patterns^{1, 4, 7}



Snidanok [Breakfast]

Light meal
Tea or coffee with sandwich or
kasha [grain cereal]



Obid [Lunch]

Largest meal of the day
Soup and a meat or
poultry dish



Vecheria [Supper]

Family gathers together
Soup, main dish, dessert

Customs

- Bread is usually served at every meal
- Meals are most often eaten at home, eating out is rare and considered a luxury
- Knife is held in the right hand, fork in the left hand
- The best food is offered to guests; it is polite for a guest to try every dish

Traditional Health Beliefs

- Food is considered healthy if it is homemade⁸
- Bread and salt were once considered necessary for health; today hosts give guests bread with salt, the bread is a symbol of hospitality and the salt represents friendship⁷
- Ukraine has a tradition of using plants for herbal medicine. Herbs and berries have been used to cure illness and prevent health conditions. Some examples include sage, chamomile, mint, burdock and oregano^{9, 10}



Traditional Bread and Salt at a wedding

Food Practices Today

- Ukraine has a legacy of a diet high in animal products and protein. This dates back to the 1960s when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Food production, cultural norms and government nutritional guidelines promoted meat and dairy products¹¹
- However, the diet has been changing. Daily or almost daily fruit and vegetable consumption increase between 2001 and 2010¹²
- A key challenge for Ukrainians trying to eat a health diet is cost – most spend over 50% of their income on food.¹³
- There are an estimated 900K-2MM Americans of Ukrainian background in the United States¹⁴
- A study in England examined food traditions of Ukrainian immigrants: the first generation stayed close to their roots and ate Ukrainian meals with nationalistic pride; the second generation began to shift traditions and started eating other culture's foods; finally the youngest generation eats in a multicultural fashion and sees British-Ukrainian food as one of many cultural cuisines they enjoy¹⁵

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