

FACT SHEET

Filipino Food, Dietary Customs, and Health Beliefs



Traditional Foods and Dishes of the Philippines

White rice¹

Meat and seafood: chicken, pork, beef, and fish¹

Fruit: banana, mango, papaya¹

Goat, cow, and pig organ meat¹

Adobo [meat marinated in garlic, salt, peppercorn, and vinegar]^{2,3}

Pancit [noodles with meat and vegetables]³

Symbolic Foods

- **Balut [boiled duck embryos]:** Balut is a key staple of Filipino pop culture.⁴ Men usually eat this late-night snack with soy sauce or rau ram [an herb similar to mint] while drinking beer.⁴ This traditional food item is inexpensive and widely available to most of the population.⁴
- **Lechon [pork roasted over the fire]:** Communities gather during special events such as religious festivals and holidays to eat this special dish.⁵ Over 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic,⁶ so this dish is often served during Christmas or fiestas for the saints.⁵ It traditionally represents Filipino heritage or power, and is usually more available to the wealthy.⁵
- **Rice:** As one of the most commonly eaten foods in the Philippines, rice represents the Filipino lifestyle and is an important part of the overall culture.¹

Traditional Eating Patterns

Meals are often served family style on flat plates placed directly on the dining table.⁷ It is common to eat with the right hand, although in more formal settings, it is appropriate to use cutlery instead.⁷ In this case, the diner uses the right hand to hold the primary utensil, the spoon.⁷ Forks, held in the opposite hand, move food toward the spoon.⁷

Snacks are often eaten in the mid-afternoon [referred to as merienda] or late evening [referred to as pulutan].⁷ Common snack foods include balut [boiled duck embryos], peanuts, salted eggs, and shrimp.^{1,4,7}

MEALS

In the Philippines, it is common to eat three meals per day²:

- **Agahan [breakfast]:** Sinangag [fried rice]²
- **Tanghalian [lunch] and hapunan [dinner]:** A combination of traditional foods including meat, rice and vegetables²

DESSERTS

Common desserts include different forms of sticky rice such as¹:

- **Biko** [sticky rice with coconut]¹
- **Suman malagkit** [sticky rice wrapped in leaves]¹

BEVERAGES

Traditional beverages include:

- **Wine:** This wine is not the usual type made from grapes. Instead, Filipino wine uses rice or sugarcane.⁷
- **Beer:** Beer is also a popular alcoholic beverage.^{4,7}

Traditional Health Beliefs

In Filipino culture, food, medicine and spirituality are connected.^{2,8} As a result, Filipino healers use prayers and herbs to heal the sick, especially during Christian feasts such as those celebrating Santo Niño de Cebu and the Black Nazarene.⁹ There is also a popular belief that illness can fall on a person as a result of misbehavior or ill will from another person.⁹

Kalusugan ay kayamanan, a Filipino saying that means *Health is Wealth*, represents a Filipino attitude toward wellness.¹⁰ Food is an important part of this overall wellbeing.¹¹ Foods such as guava shoots and am [leftover rice water] can serve as a treatment for diarrhea.²

Filipino Food Practices

In the Philippines, there are several traditional ways to prepare food.¹ Vinegar, soy sauce, and fish sauce are often used during preparation.¹ Kinilaw [raw fish marinated in vinegar and garlic] is an example of this.¹ This food preparation practice, along with the practice of eating fresh or live seafood, is often lost in Filipino-American culture.¹ After moving to the United States, Filipino-Americans report eating more meat and dairy instead.¹² However, it is also more common to eat a wider variety of fresh fruits and vegetables once in the United States.¹²

There are several reasons for these shifts in dietary practices. In the United States, meat, dairy and vegetables are more widely available.¹ In the Philippines, these food items may be too expensive to buy often.¹ Given that the Philippines is a country made up of islands, there is greater access to the water and fresh fish instead.¹

Food is also a key part of Filipino social life.¹¹ It is considered rude not to accept food from another person, since this is often a symbol of the relationship between the two individuals.¹¹

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