

# Food and Culture of Ethiopia



## Fact Sheet

### Traditional Food and Dishes

Ethiopia is home to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and these religious faiths influence the Ethiopian cuisine.<sup>2</sup> This influences the consumption of meat products and the pattern of meat consumption nationwide.<sup>3</sup> Ethiopians do not eat pork or pork-based food products.<sup>4</sup> Ethiopian cuisine is not only healthy and nutritious, but also very flavorful.<sup>5</sup> Food is often flavored with a mixture of spices called berbere. Spices are also used to preserve meat. Barley is a staple food crop used in many traditional main recipes such as injera, kita and dabo.<sup>6</sup> Wat, a spicy stew is the national dish of Ethiopia. These are some of the Ethiopian traditional foods and spices:

- ❖ Injera - a thin, pancake-like, sour, leavened bread which can be made of either tef, corn or barley<sup>7</sup>
- ❖ Mesir wat – red lentil puree<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Doro wat - chicken stew with hard boiled eggs<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Keffa – Ethiopian coffee
- ❖ Shiro be Kibbe – legume stew<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Fossolia – green beans, carrots, onions and garlic sautéed in olive oil<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Kitfo – ground beef served raw with clarified butter and spicy chili powder (*mitmita*)<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Ayibe – mild crumbly cottage cheese<sup>1</sup>

### Spice Mixtures

- ❖ Berbere - blend of spices such as chili powder, fenugreek, ginger, garlic, cardamom, cinnamon and other spices<sup>7</sup>
- ❖ Awaze – paste version of berbere mixed with olive oil and Ethiopian honey wine<sup>7</sup>
- ❖ Niter Kibbeh – clarified butter mixed with spices such as fenugreek, cumin and turmeric<sup>7</sup>



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

## Traditional Eating Practices

It is common to eat the same food for breakfast (kuris), lunch (mesa) and dinner (erat).<sup>9</sup> Breakfast (kuris) consists of fir fir which is made of shredded injera or kitcha, stir-fried with spices.<sup>9</sup> Another popular breakfast dish is fatira, a large pancake served with an egg and honey.<sup>9</sup> Genfo is a type of porridge served for breakfast with niter kibbeh.<sup>9</sup>

- ❖ Before a meal, hands are washed over a basin with water<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Food is shared from a large communal platter called gebetta, and eaten by hand, and only the right hand is used to eat<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ The oldest person or an esteemed guest is the first to take food from the communal plate<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Guests are often served tasty snacks by another guest, a tradition called *gursa*<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ A meal ends with a hand washing ritual and coffee is served<sup>8</sup>

## Religious and holiday celebrations

Vegetarian meals are served during Lent and on fasting days where Orthodox Christians eat dishes made from beans, lentils and chick peas called mitin shiro, a mixture of beans and berbere, as well as a vegetable stew called aterkek alecha.<sup>8</sup> Oilseed sauce served with injera is common during fasting periods.<sup>6</sup> Beverages made of flax, safflower or fenugreek seeds are usually served during this time.<sup>6</sup>

## Traditional Health Beliefs

Like other cultures, Ethiopians have beliefs and attitudes related to food. For example, porridge is believed to give extra strength after childbirth and during sickness.<sup>4,6</sup> It is also believed that genfo and kinche, both breakfast porridges heal broken bones and damaged body organs because of the smooth consistency and easy to digest.<sup>6</sup>

## Current food practices of Ethiopian culture, at home and in the United States

Washington D.C has the largest population of Ethiopians in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Ethiopian-Americans continue to hold on to their heritage which is passed onto their children at ethnic gatherings and through festival celebrations.<sup>11</sup> Home cooked meals include traditional dishes as well as the American cuisine.<sup>11</sup>

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