

Fact Sheet: Food & Culture in Greece

Traditional Foods and Dishes:

Greeks eat what is available and what is in season.¹ Each region has its own foods that are especially valuable.¹

- *Greek Coffee* – crucial to the day and thought to be highly nutritious.¹ Cold coffee is called a *frappe* [shaken instant Nescafé].¹
- *Tzatziki* [yogurt sauce with cucumber and garlic] - Served alongside or on top of dishes.¹
- *Gyro* [meat and spices formed on a vertical rotating spit sliced and served with pita and tzatziki] - Widely popular food served in a *giradika*.¹
- *Baklava* [sweet made of several different layers of phyllo pastry, nuts and syrup] - Sweets are commonly served with a cup of Greek coffee.¹
- Bread, wine, and olive oil have been the foundation to Greek cooking and health since ancient times.¹



- Bread is the symbol of life and used in Holy Communion in the Greek Orthodox church.¹ About 98% of the population is Greek Orthodox.¹



- Olives are sacred– symbolizes wisdom, prosperity, youth and health.^{1,2} It was Hippocrates and the Old Testament that said to treat wounds with oil and wine.^{3,4}



- Wine is always served with meals.¹ Wine is used in Holy Communion in the Orthodox church.⁴ Hippocrates also said that pure wine could heal wounds quickly.³



Traditional Eating Patterns:

- 7 am- Greeks tend to start their day with a cup of Greek coffee (or *frappe*).¹
- 11 am– a late-morning snack that may be *tiropita* [cheese pie], *spanakopita* [spinach pie], or *koulouri* [bagel] from a bakery.¹
- 2-4 pm- The main meal is lunch. Everything closes since lunch is highly valued.¹ Lunch includes bread, salad, cheese, a main course, and fruit.¹
- 5 pm– Early evening snack may be a Greek coffee and fruit.¹
- 8-9 pm- Dinner tends to be made up of a small *meze* [small plates].¹ Bread, cheese, sauces, small pieces of meat, fruit, and vegetables are served.¹

Holidays and Religious Traditions:

- Kathara Deftera, “Cleansing Monday,” marks the start of the 40-day fast of Lent before Easter.¹ The Orthodox Church prohibits olive oil and all animal products on this day.¹ *Lagana* [a bread made from flour, water, and sesame seeds] is made for this day since there is no olive oil in it.¹
- Great Week and Easter Day are spent in the kitchen.¹ Special foods like *dolmades* [vine leaves stuffed with rice and vegetables], *tsourekia* [sweet dough Easter bread], and roasted whole lamb are highlights.¹
- *Koliva* [dried bread with fruits and sugar added] is served at weddings and funerals.¹



Traditional Health Beliefs:

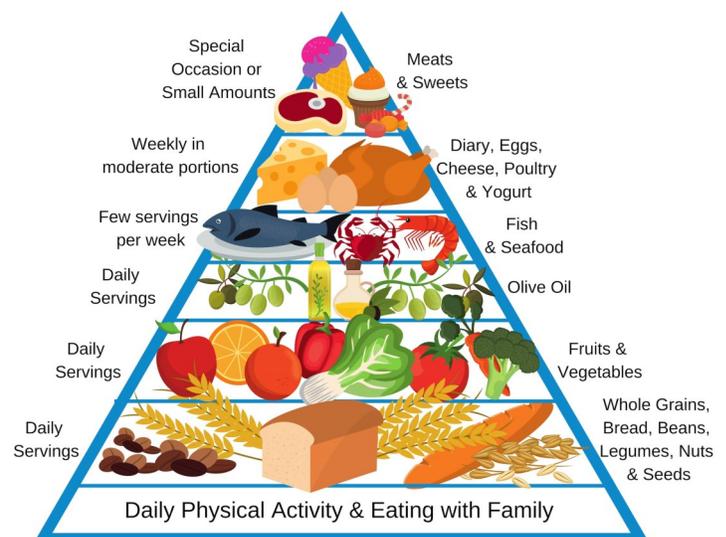
Greeks strongly believe that food is the foundation to physical and mental health.¹ This comes from ancient times and philosophers like Hippocrates.¹

- Greeks rarely eat raw foods. They believe the longer something cooks, the healthier it is for you.¹
- The Orthodox church has fasting periods that restrict the use of animal products.¹ Besides spiritual benefits, they also believe this allows for the elimination of toxins from the body built up from animal products.¹
- Greek coffee dissolved in lemon is consumed to help with diarrhea.¹
- *Glistrida* [purslane salad] is helps to treat high cholesterol.¹
- Those with high blood pressure should eat more onions and people with low blood pressure should eat more garlic.¹

Current Food Practices:

The latest NHANES survey of the Greek population identified four common dietary patterns:^{5,6}

- The 'traditional' Mediterranean diet is composed of heart healthy fats, high intake of fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains, moderate intake of dairy, moderate alcohol, and low intake of meat.² Following this 'traditional' eating pattern is known to reduce risk for heart disease and promote longevity.^{2,5,6} This dietary pattern is slowly disappearing and becoming 'Westernized'.^{5,6}
- The 'Western' eating pattern is more prevalent now dominated by processed meats, high intake of animal products, fat, sugar-sweetened beverages, and refined grains.^{5,6}
- The 'prudent' eating pattern emphasizes higher intakes of fruit, whole grains, yogurt, poultry, and limited fast food.^{5,6}
- The 'snack-type' eating pattern was identified in Greek women.⁵ This emphasizes ready-to-eat and easy-to-prepare foods. Salty snacks (chips, crackers), sweets, nuts, and increased sweetener use were found.⁵
- Western and snack-type patterns were associated with lower socioeconomic status while the traditional and prudent patterns were associated with the opposite.⁵
- Traditional Mediterranean recipes are high in vegetables, fiber, and olive oil.⁷ Most of the calories in this eating pattern are derived from fat.⁷
- Heart disease and other conditions associated (high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes) have become more prominent in this country as eating patterns have become more Westernized.⁶



MEDITERRANEAN DIET

<https://shimacrobiotics.org/mediterranean-diet-vs-macrobiotics/>



References

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