

GREECE



History

- The first wave of immigration to America began at the end of the 19th century and continued up to the 1920's. Main reasons for leaving Greece included unemployment, high prices and low wages.
- In that time about 400,000 Greeks immigrated to America and settled in major cities such as Chicago, New York, Boston and Detroit.
- A second wave of Greek immigration occurred in the 1960's-1970's. They came to this country for schooling and business opportunities.

Health Concerns

- Increased rates of cigarette smoking leading to lung cancer in older people; young Greek Americans are not smoking as much.
- Increased rate of osteoporosis in women.
- Hypertension due to a high salt diet.
- Thalassemia: iron deficiency disorder, common in Greeks from Peloponnesus.
- Greeks believe that sickness is due to stress or the 'evil eye.'
 - You stay healthy if you surround yourself with good family and friends who like to have a good time.
 - *Mati* (evil eye) is very real and should not be ridiculed; if someone is sick people will discuss you may have given the evil eye to the patient.
 - They like doctors but "Doctors know books. We know life."

Food Management Practices

- Women traditionally prepare the meal, but the whole family is often involved.
- Women have tight relationships shown with food. Food is an expected part of any social interaction.
- The children usually do not participate in food management on a daily basis, but contribute in preparing and serving food on holidays.
- Buying fresh ingredients and preparing family meals from scratch are the norm even in our fast paced society; increased guilt if you don't cook.
- Going out to eat is frowned upon as you can make better food at home.
- Shop everyday for fresh baked bread; bread is huge; all white.
- Most Greeks practice the Greek Orthodox religion however, some Greeks are Greek Protestants.

Foods

- Offer food, appetizers, and drinks to a guest even if they refuse.
- When visiting family and friends, Greeks will always bring food.



- Core foods
 - Lamb
 - Bread
 - Olive oil and olives
 - Cheese (feta and goat cheese)
 - Honey
 - Wine
 - Legumes: lentil soup and *fasolada* (white bean tomato soup) are eaten once a week
 - Lima beans cooked in a tomato sauce
 - Dark green leafy vegetables (dandelions, spinach, mustard, fennel, cumin, and purslane)
 - Fruit (figs, pears, plums, grapes, melons and oranges)
 - Watermelon and figs are very popular
- Sub-Core Foods
 - *Tsatziki* (garlic-cucumber-yogurt dip), *Tarama Salata* (fish roe salad), *Melitzana Salata* (eggplant salad), legumes (lentils, beans, peas, chickpeas), *ouzo* (an alcoholic beverage), *Baklava* (a phyllo dough pastry), *Yaourti me meli* (yogurt with honey)
 - plain yogurt with nuts and honey snack; or with fruit breakfast
 - nuts – including almonds, walnuts, pistachios
- Traditional Meals
 - Usually consists of roasted lamb, cucumber and tomato salad with olive oil, feta cheese, bread, roasted potatoes, ouzo and Baklava for dessert
 - Stuffed tomatoes and pepper every week all summer because they are in season; stuffed with rice, parsley, tomato puree and small amount of ground meat for flavoring; some add golden raisins
 - Every Wednesday and Friday, Greek families eat fish and bean-based foods; no meat

Specific Food Practices

- Young children offered a glass of wine or beer at dinner as young as 5 years old.
- Elders are highly respected and teach the younger generations how to prepare special meals – passing down of recipes revered.
- Pregnant women are encouraged to eat a bit of everything and drink wine.
- After childbirth wine makes the milk ‘rich’ and soups increase the volume.
- At funerals, eat *koliva*, a malted wheat sweetened with honey, pomegranates, sugar etc. as a symbol of death and resurrection.

Major Celebrations

- Name days – traditionally name a child after a patron Saint, and each Saint has a special feast day, which becomes the child’s name day.
 - The child with that name throws a party with food and drink
 - A person stays home on their name day and receives guests; you are the host so you pay
 - Similar to a birthday party
 - Guests bring small gifts, such as chocolate or a piece of a traditional sweet cake, *Galaktoboureko*

- Commonly served foods:
 - Dishes – Dolmades, grape-leaf bundles stuffed with herbed rice and pine nuts, *souvlaki*, skewered meats, *spanakopita*, spinach-cheese pie, *moussaka*, casserole of beef, eggplant and potatoes, saganaki or fried cheese, loukaniko, or Greek sausage, *skordo psito*, or roasted garlic, *ochtapodi*, octopus, and *pastitsio*, a lasagna-like casserole of ground beef layered with pasta and veggies and topped with a béchamel sauce.
 - Desserts - baklava, a pastry made of layers of *phyllo* filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with honey, *finikia* or honey-dipped, nut-covered cookies, *galaktoboureko*, a baked-in-pastry custard, and *loukoumathes*, deep-fried puffs topped with warm honey, cinnamon and nuts.
- New Year's Day - the most important dish is *Vassilopitta* or St Basil's cake, inside the cake is placed a silver or gold coin. Whoever is lucky enough to find a coin in their cake must be careful not to bite into it!! The cake is distributed in accordance to a strict order. First piece is for St Basil, the second for the house, the next for the most senior member of the household down to the youngest member and also including absent members. There may also be a piece of cake for the cattle and a large piece for the poor. Whoever finds the coin in their piece of cake will be lucky for the next year.
- Weddings – *Koufetta*, the Greek name for Jordan almonds, are placed on a tray for all to share. This tray (usually silver) is also decorated with rice. *Koufetta* are also used in the decoration of favors, usually wrapped in plain tulle or dainty handkerchiefs. It is customary to put odd numbers of *koufetta* in the favors because odd numbers are indivisible, symbolizing how the wedding couple stand as one and share everything. The general significance the Jordan almond is that fresh almonds have a bittersweet taste, which represents life. The sugarcoating is added with the hope that the married couple's life will be more sweet than bitter.
- Christmas – fast from meat and dairy a week before Christmas.
- Easter - the most important holiday. Greeks follow the Greek Orthodox religion
 - Lent: 40 day fast, strict Greeks will fast from meat, while most refrain from consuming meat on Wednesday and Fridays
 - Good Friday: fast from meat, all dairy, olives and olive oil
 - Saturday night before Easter (*Mega Savato*): Crack red dyed eggs to celebrate that Christ has risen, lamb soup, *Magiritsa* is the main dish
 - Easter Day: lamb on spit, feta, olives, spinach pie, *spankopita*, Easter sweet bread, *tsoureki*
- Greek Independence Day - eat a traditional Greek meal, March 25th.

Communication Style

- Very social people.
- Sharing food with others is important in Greek culture. Cooking and eating are important social occasions. The quality of the food is an important topic of conversation and swapping recipes is common when people share a meal.
- A handshake is normal in greeting someone, but friends and relatives hug and kiss each other.
- Young men often slap each other on the back or arm at shoulder level instead of shaking hands.
- Close friends and family members are called by their first names, but acquaintances and strangers are addressed by their title and surname.

- Ancient Greeks believed a stranger might be a god in disguise and were therefore kind to all strangers. This tradition of hospitality continues to the present day. It is common for friends and relatives to drop by unannounced in small towns. This happens less often in large cities, but only because schedules are more hectic. Greeks enjoy inviting friends to their homes for dinner or for special occasions, such as name days (the feast day of the saint after whom one is named) or New Year's Day. Christmas and Easter are days for family gatherings.
 - Typically have a loud volume of speech which is due to passion not anger.
 - Eye contact: a sign of understanding.
 - Touching: greeting all individuals by kissing cheeks is a sign of welcome and respect.
 - Silence: typical to interrupt if another individual is speaking.
 - Aggression: behavior is common in social interactions.
 - Physical Space: arm's length is comfortable.
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