

LEBANON

Marhaaba! ("Hello" in Arabic)



History of immigration to America

- Lebanese immigration started in the late 19th century. Many of the Lebanese immigrants were motivated by stories of freedom and equality told by American missionaries. However, the major factors for coming to America were economic ambition and family competition. Having a son or daughter in America was a mark of status.
- Immigration dropped during World War I and during the Immigration Quota Act (1929-1965).
- It began again in the mid 1970's when civil war broke out in Lebanon (1975-1991).
- By the 1960's, the descendants of the earliest Lebanese immigrants had almost completely assimilated into mainstream America.
- The later Lebanese immigrants maintained a stronger ethnic heritage, resulting in a higher Arabic-speaking population in the United States.
- The largest concentration of Lebanese Americans is found in New England and the Midwest. Cities in New England include Utica, NY; Boston, Lawrence, Lowell, and Springfield, MA; Fall River, Providence, RI; and Danbury, CT.
- Other cities with high concentrations include New Orleans, LA; Jacksonville, FL; Detroit and Dearborn, MI; and Toledo, OH.

Health Concerns

- Lebanese have above-average incidences of anemia and lactose intolerance. The anemia is called Thalassemia is an inherited autosomal recessive blood disease. The genetic defect results in reduced rate of synthesis of one of the globin chains that make up hemoglobin. The treatment for serious conditions usually includes a chronic blood transfusion therapy.
- Second hand smoke is a big concern in Lebanon. The WHO is working toward making working places 100% smoke free.

Food Management Practices

- In Lebanese cultures, mothers are in charge of maintaining the household which includes preparing and serving meals. Daughters assist in food preparation and take over if the mother is absent. Shopping for fresh food at markets takes place several times per week. The main meal may be eaten in the afternoon or evening but usually it takes place in the afternoon. All the dishes in the meal are served in different courses.
- In the Middle East, guests invited to a home bring a gift - usually candy or other sweets, and the host must open it immediately and serve.
- If a guest refuses food offered to them it is considered an insult.

Foods

- Core foods of the Lebanese include, lamb, chicken, fish, yogurt, cheese, chickpeas, nuts, eggplant, cucumbers, and tomatoes.
- Sub-core foods include sesame (seeds, paste, and oil), *burghul* (cracked wheat), parsley, mint, lemons, onions, and garlic.
- The national dish of Lebanon is *kibbeh*, an emulsified paste of fresh lamb and bulgur wheat with spices.
- Meat tends to be made into nuggets and charcoaled or stuffed into vegetables.
- Vegetables are usually the main feature of the meal. Meat is considered to be the side dish, or usually stuffed in vegetables with rice and spices.
- Grapes leaves can be stuffed with meat and rice, chickpeas, or vegetables.
- Some pastries are stuffed with dates and or nuts.
- Dips and stews are popular dishes and fresh herbs and spices are used instead of heavy sauces.
- The two common types of bread consumed are *marcook* (a thin bread baked on a domed dish over fire), and flat pita pockets.
- Coffee is a staple in the Lebanese diet; it is drunk throughout the day. Most Lebanese people drink strong, Turkish-style coffee in a demitasse cup; coffee is heavily sweetened.
- *Baklava* is also a popular Lebanese dessert. Lebanese baklava contains pistachio nuts and is drizzled with rose-water syrup, while the Greek variety usually contains walnuts and honey.

Specific Food Practices

- For Muslim's, who constitute 60% of the Lebanese population, overeating is discouraged. Permitted foods are called *halal*. Prohibited foods are called *haram*. Foods that Muslims are not allowed to eat include pork, birds of prey, and alcohol beverages. Animals must be slaughtered according to certain laws.
- In American-Lebanese households it is more common to use beef instead of the traditional lamb. It is traditional to make everything from scratch; the most current American-Lebanese households are using some convenience items from local stores to aid in making complicated dishes.
- Some Lebanese Muslims believe that following childbirth, a woman is especially susceptible to wind.
 - Lebanese women often eat eggs cooked in garlic and chicken soup after childbirth.
 - Showers and baths are avoided for ten days to prevent wind from entering the veins and causing sickness.

Major Celebrations that Utilize Food

- Ramadan is the most popular celebration of the Muslims.
 - It occurs during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast during the daylight hours and eat small meals in the evening with friends and family.
 - At the end of Ramadan, the fast is concluded with a large mahajan (feast) called *Iftar*. Soup, *fatteh* (a chick pea and yogurt dish), and *karbooj* (a nut-rich pastry) are especially eaten during Ramadan. Muslims do not eat any pork products.

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- Pregnancy, lactation, menstruation, the elderly, and the sick are all exceptions for fasting and are allowed to make it up at a later time.
- Many pregnant Muslim-American women do not discuss Ramadan fasting with their prenatal care provider for fear of being treated disrespectfully or being told to stop.
- *Eid ul-Fitr* or *Id-ul-Fitr* often abbreviated to *Eid*, is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. *Eid* is an Arabic word meaning "festivity", while *Fiṭr* means "to break the fast" (and can also mean "nature", from the word "*fitrah*"); and so the holiday symbolizes the breaking of the fasting period and is described as a cross between the feasting of Thanksgiving and the festivities of Christmas.
- During Lent, Lebanese Christians eat meatless dishes. Most Christian Orthodox people in Lebanon observe Lent by fasting sun up to sun down.

Communication Style

- In Middle Eastern cultures, it is normal to have 6-12 inches of space between people for conversational speech.
 - Body language is more important to communication than words.
 - It is best to wait for a Middle Easterner to extend a hand in shaking and avoid any touching.
 - If a person is observant in the Muslim religion, communication between women and men not in the family and outside the family home is not encouraged.
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