

**Join us for the Fitwize Nutrition Talk on
Friday, March 23
from 4 to 5 PM!**

During the March nutrition session, we are going to learn about food among different cultures. We will talk about how food can bring us together despite our differences.

Food Brings Cultures Together

By Stephanie Mull, MS, RD, CSSD, CSCS

If there is one commonality among people, it is food. We need food to survive as it gives us nourishment and energy. Despite cultural differences, one thing we can always do together is eat. This month's nutrition session will focus on cultural differences and similarities to align with the Fitwize INSPIRE theme of Removing Barriers, Celebrating Each Other. Ellen Gustafson, founder of the FEED project and The 30 Project, says that food is used in every single culture and religion as part of their celebrations.

“The celebratory nature of food is universal. Every season, every harvest, and every holiday has its own food, and this is true in America as well. It helps define us.”

Asian Food: The Chinese culture use food to signify status. Serving seafood, especially specialty fish, demonstrates worldliness. It's also very common to use various foods, such as Jellyfish or sliced pig's ear, for texture preferences versus flavor or taste. Food is served either very hot or cold, and dishes are served in a certain order. We often think about Asian food including rice or noodles, which are the staples in a traditional Asian diet.

France and Italy: Food in this France is more about pleasure. Eating is a slow and enjoyable process. Bread, butter, pastries, butter and cheese are common foods found at meals. Italians eat because they love the food. Nutrient content of food is also important. Common foods in this culture include pasta, fish, and meat. However, both French and Italian cultures follow similar dietary guidelines as Americans do.

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern: Food is a critical component to the communities in these cultures. People will eat with their hands to share food from the same dishes. It's family style where no one gets a plated meal. Food is shared. Plant-based foods, including grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, along with fish and heart-healthy fats are the foundation of the diets in these cultures.

The best way to bring some worldliness to your life is to experience food from these cultures. You not only increase variety in your own diet but you begin to understand how other cultures celebrate food. This opens us up to connecting with people from other cultures and religions. Barriers are built from a lack of understanding. If there is one avenue by which to begin to learn about others, it's through eating and food!