

Food in America



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Many people believe that Americans only eat fatty and unhealthy foods. While it is true that there are a lot of fast food chain restaurants that serve unhealthy food in the U.S., most Americans do not eat fast food for every meal. They balance their diets with vegetables and whole grains and only eat out every once in a while.

Visitors to the U.S. will find that portions in restaurants are often enough for 2 or even 3 meals. Americans like to eat food from lots of other countries, too. Chinese, Italian and Mexican restaurants can be found most commonly, but there is representation from all sorts of nationalities, especially in large cities.

Americans, both men and women, take an interest in food and cooking. Cooking programs and competitions are very popular. During the summer, many people enjoy grilling outside, or having a "BBQ."

On average, Americans work more hours a week and during the year than people in other countries. So people don't have much time to shop for and cook fresh food. Supermarkets sell "convenience food," pre-cooked dishes that can be heated up and served in 5 to 20 minutes. Americans also buy a lot of frozen and canned food. The microwave is a great time-saver in many homes.

In short, the food scene in America is mixed. Here is an idea of what you might expect during a normal week. Notice that meal times may differ from those in your country.

Breakfast

This is often a quick meal, usually between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. just before people leave home for work or college.

Light breakfasts are common, especially during the working week. They include: cereal (such as cornflakes, muesli, oatmeal, etc.) with milk, toast and jam or jelly, a glass of juice (orange, grapefruit, etc.), and tea or coffee. Coffee is usually black or with milk and a little sugar. Other common breakfast foods include yogurt, with fruit or honey, and a piece of fruit such as an apple, orange or banana.

Notice that this is a cold food breakfast. If you are used to warm food for breakfast you may prefer the cooked breakfast.

Cooked breakfasts are less common on a daily basis, especially during the working week. It may include scrambled or fried eggs, hash browns (grated and fried potatoes), bacon, sausage or ham and toast with butter. Other breakfast foods may include pancakes, French toast or waffles, any of which would be served with butter and maple syrup. Many people often enjoy having their eggs as an omelet. These sorts of breakfast are typically reserved for the weekends, when there is more time to cook and enjoy a meal.

Lunch

Lunch is usually eaten at some time between 12:00 and 1:30 p.m. Lunch usually lasts about 30 minutes. Some families call this meal "dinner." Most people eat a light lunch on working days. A sandwich and a piece of fruit will usually suffice for most Americans. You can purchase the bread and fillings and prepare your sandwich in your dorm or at your host home or you can always find sandwich shops around the school. Many Americans prefer to prepare salads to bring to work or school. Grocery stores also offer a

plethora of frozen, ready-to-microwave meals that you can choose from to bring to school.

Dinner

This meal usually occurs during the early evening at any time between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. Some families call this meal "supper." What do people usually eat for dinner?

Traditional American food

Meat (beef, chicken or pork) or fish with potatoes and a vegetable is a common American meal. The meat is usually roasted, fried or grilled. The potatoes are often in "mashed" form, or boiled or baked whole, served with either gravy or butter and salt. Popular vegetable sides include broccoli, spinach, peas and carrots, green beans or leafy greens, any of which might be sautéed, boiled or fried. In general, you may find that Americans eat more meat than in your country. Pasta dishes are also very common in American homes (spaghetti, lasagna, etc.).

For dessert, chocolate pastries, ice cream, cakes and pies are popular. Americans eat dessert as the last part of a main meal.





International food

Pizza, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Italian or Indian foods are popular and common international cuisines to find in the U.S. These meals are often either ordered ahead of time and picked up or delivered straight to the home.

Meals on weekends

Meals and meal times may be different on weekends if people are not working. Some families like to enjoy their free time without having to spend a lot of time cooking.

Take-out and delivery are popular time-savers on weekends. Other families may enjoy cooking and having a big family meal. This often happens on Sundays.

Special diets

More and more people are becoming vegetarian. This means they do not eat meat. Others are vegan. They do not eat anything connected to animals, such as meat, cheese, milk or eggs.

Some people have allergies to wheat or dairy products and cannot eat them. Others do not eat certain foods for religious reasons.

If you cannot or do not want to eat certain foods for any reason, tell us about it before you come to the U.S. We can then choose the right family for you.

Study tips

Watch what, how and when Americans eat. Do you notice differences between American families? How are eating habits different from your country? For example, what fruit do Americans generally eat and how do they eat it?

Also, write down recipes that you would like to take back to your own country. Ask your host for recipes or copy them from recipe books. Ask other students about their eating experiences in the U.S. Is their experience similar or different to yours?

Things to know about food and eating with your hosts

- Expect the food to be different. Try to be 'open-minded'. Take the opportunity to try lots of new, different foods. You might like them.
- Be prepared to try everything once. You only have to taste it. If you don't like it, you won't have to eat it.
- Tell us and your hosts before you arrive if you have a special diet, especially if you are a vegetarian or cannot eat certain foods. We will be happy to help you.
- Tell your hosts what you like and don't like. They will not be offended.
- If you have any difficulties with the amount or quality of the food you get with the host family, speak to the Accommodation Officers at Kings. They will be able to advise and help you.
- If you really miss food from your country, offer to make your host family a meal. Most supermarkets sell international food and spices.
- Cold water from the tap is perfectly safe in the U.S. However, many people prefer bottled water or to filter the water before drinking it.

Language tips

Here are some polite questions and answers you can use while eating with your host family.

Question: Would you like a second helping? (= Would you like some more food?)

Answer: Yes, please

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was very nice but I'm full up now. (= I can't eat any more)

OR

Answer: No, thank you. That was delicious but I want to save some room for dessert.

Question: You haven't eaten very much. Didn't you like it?

Answer: It was lovely. I had a big lunch/ I don't feel very hungry tonight.