

Food

Visitors to the US often think either that there is no real American food, only dishes borrowed from other countries, or else that Americans eat only ***fast food**. While there is some truth in both these impressions, real American food does exist.

The British also have a poor reputation for food. Visitors to Britain often complain that food in restaurants is badly presented, overcooked and has no taste. But the best British food is not generally found in restaurants but in people's homes.

British cooking

Certain foods are considered essential to traditional British cooking and form the basis of most *meals. These include bread, pastry (for meat or fruit pies) and dairy products such as milk, cheese and eggs. Potatoes, especially **chips** (*AmE* fries), are eaten at lunch or dinner. They are an important part of the traditional meal of **meat and two veg** (= meat, potatoes and another vegetable). A **jacket potato** (= a potato baked whole in its skin) with cheese is a popular *pub lunch. Because of the increased cost of meat and various health scares many people now eat less meat. **Vegetarians** (= people who choose not to eat meat at all) and **vegans** (= people who eat no meat or animal products) are relatively few. After the main course, many families eat a **pudding**. This was traditionally sponge or pastry cooked with jam or fruit, usually served hot with *custard, but it may now be yogurt, fresh fruit or ice cream.

Good plain home cooking, i.e. food prepared without spicy or creamy sauces, used to be something to be proud of. Since the 1970s British people have become more adventurous in what they eat and often cook foreign dishes. Rice, pasta and noodles are regularly eaten instead of potatoes. Supermarkets offer an expanding range of foreign foods, including many **convenience foods** (= prepared meals that need only to be heated). **Takeaways** from Indian or Chinese restaurants are also popular.

People's interest in trying new **recipes** is encouraged by the many cookery programmes on television. Famous TV **chefs** include Delia *Smith and Ainsley Harriott. Few older men know how to cook, but many younger men share the cooking as well as other household chores.

Food in America

American dishes include many made from traditional foods. **Corn** is eaten as **corn on the cob**, which is boiled and eaten hot with butter, ground up into small pieces and cooked again to make **grits**, or baked to make **cornbread**. It can be dried and cooked with oil to make **popcorn**, which is eaten hot covered with melted butter and salt. **Turkey** was originally an American bird and is the most important dish at *Thanksgiving. It is served with a sauce made from an American plant, the **cranberry**, a small, red, sour berry, and is usually followed by **pumpkin pie**. The **hamburger** may also come from the US. The ***sandwich**, originally from Britain, is made with great variety in America.

Many of America's most popular dishes have been borrowed from other cultures. This **ethnic food** is not always the same in the US as in the country it comes from. Many popular dishes come from Italy, especially pasta dishes and pizza. From Mexico there are burritos, tacos and enchiladas; from China there are egg rolls, chop suey and egg foo yong; and from Japan sushi and teriyaki.

When Americans make food at home they rarely use basic **ingredients** (= raw foods). Cakes, for example, are often made from **cake mixes** bought in a box. They also use many **prepared foods** (= meals that need only to be heated). Americans also often **order in** (= have a meal delivered to their home by a restaurant).

In the 1980s younger people especially became more interested in food. These **foodies** helped to increase the variety of dishes and ingredients available in America. Olive oil became commonly used in cooking, and new sauces were developed for pasta. Many styles of real coffee also became popular.

Eating out

When British and American people eat out (= in a restaurant), they can choose from a wide range of eating places. The busiest tend to be **burger bars**, **pizzerias** and other **fast-food outlets** which are popular with young people and families. In Britain these have largely replaced traditional cafés selling meals like sausage, egg and chips, though most towns still have several ***fish and chip shops**. Many *pubs also serve reasonably priced meals.

Many people eat out at Italian, Mexican and Chinese restaurants and at **curry houses**. Fewer people go to smarter, more expensive restaurants. With the great variety of food available at relatively low prices, eating out is common.

Food and health

In Britain the government regularly gives advice about **healthy eating**. The main aim is to reduce the amount of fatty foods and sugar people eat, and to encourage them to eat more fruit and vegetables. Many people still enjoy a **fry-up** (= fried bacon, sausage and egg with fried bread) but there has been a gradual move towards eating healthier low-fat foods. Health risks connected with, for example, beef or eggs, are discussed by the media. People are also concerned about chemicals sprayed onto crops. Supermarkets sell **organic produce** (= cereals and vegetables grown without the use of chemicals), but few people are prepared to pay the higher prices for this.

Americans believe food has an important effect on their health but they do not always eat in a healthy way. Many eat **junk food**, including fast food, **snacks** like potato chips (*BrE* crisps) and cookies (*BrE* biscuits), fizzy drinks and ice cream. Some people eat mainly **health foods**. They take **vitamin** and **mineral supplements** and rush to eat the latest foods said to be healthy, like olive oil, oats and garlic. Americans always seem to be fighting a battle between what they want to eat and what is good for them. Most Americans weigh too much, so it seems that they still mostly eat what they want.

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