

## Food and Culinary Adventure to Spain

I've always been fascinated by the lifestyle of people living in the Mediterranean. This year, I decided to observe that lifestyle firsthand by visiting Madrid, Spain for a week. I also wanted to see for myself their dietary and physical activity habits, which lead to decreased rates of disease. While I was there, I picked up some practical tips that I hope my clients will benefit from.

It's a well-known fact that people following a Mediterranean diet have better overall health. And, that's certainly true for people living in Spain. There, the average life expectancy is about 84 for women and 77 for men. This is higher than life expectancy rates in the U.S. of about 80 for women and 75 for men.

People in Spain enjoy good health, and the incidence of heart disease there is among the lowest in the world. Compared to the U.S., people living in Spain also have lower rates of obesity. However, they smoke considerably more.

	Spain	United States
Heart Disease Deaths	53.8 per 100,000 people	<b>106.5 per 100,000 people</b>
Obesity	13.1%	<b>30.6%</b>
<b>Daily Smokers</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>

Source: <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/sp-spain/hea-health>

### The Daily Diet

People in Spain also enjoy good food, and they eat well throughout the day. Seasonal ingredients, such as fruits and vegetables, are often incorporated into their meals and snacks.

Breakfast is usually a light meal with coffee and either a bocadillo (bread roll), tosta (slice of toast with tapas), sandwich, or churros. In mid- to late-morning, a coffee break is common, with people eating a small sandwich or enjoying a pastry.

Unlike in America, the main meal of the day in Spain is lunch. Lunch is usually an elaborate affair with several courses. People may dine on Gazpacho (cold soup), a Spanish tortilla made with eggs and vegetables, bread, and a drink. Lunch in Spain can last for 1-2 hours, with an additional hour or so for a siesta (short nap). During siesta, some shops close for a few hours so that shopkeepers can rest and enjoy their meals, too.

People in Spain work a long day and eat dinner much later in the evening, so an afternoon snack is very common. Similar to the morning snack, the afternoon snack may include a beverage, sandwich or simply a pastry.

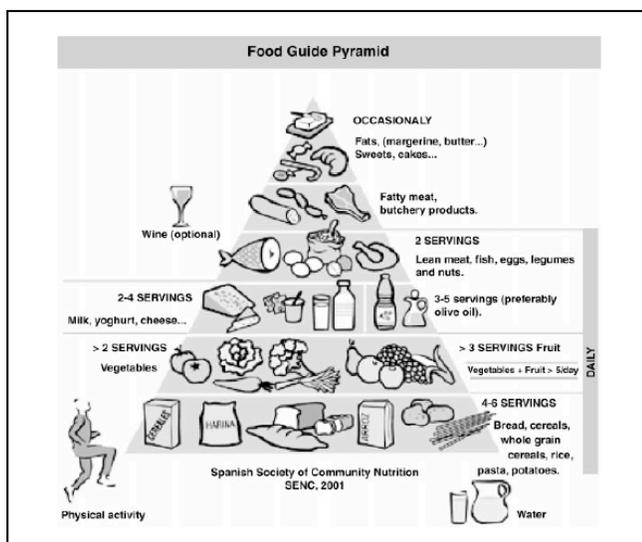
Dinner is eaten much later in the evening, and is a smaller meal than lunch. Tapas (small plates of food) is popular during the dinner meal.

The quality of their foods and beverages is important to people living in Spain. For example, in recent years they've started to spend more money on good quality wines. And, with busy schedules, good-quality convenience foods are growing in popularity.

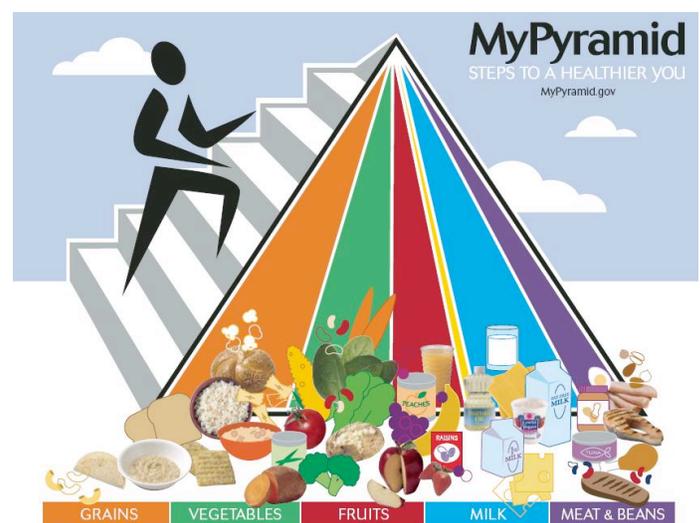
Some additional differences in the eating habits of people in Spain compared to people in the U.S are that they eat smaller portions of food, and they eat their meals much more slowly.

### Food Guide Recommendations

Similar to dietary recommendations in the U.S., it's recommend that people in Spain follow a pyramid shaped food guide.



Spanish Food Guide Pyramid



U.S. MyPyramid

In general, people in Spain consume a diet consisting largely of grains, fruits and vegetables. They emphasize fish and seafood as well as olive oil in their diets. Compared to the diets of people in the U.S., people in Spain drink more wine and eat smaller amounts of red meat. Because their diets are less processed than diets of people living in the U.S., they consume less sodium. And, while the food pyramids of both countries recommend physical activity, people in Spain get more exercise through daily activities, such as walking.

Research continues to evolve about the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet. And, research is ongoing in the area of red wine consumption and heart-

disease risk. It's believed by some researchers that the antioxidant properties of the polyphenols in red wine help reduce the risk of heart disease, but not all studies have been conclusive.

To try to get the same health benefits here in the U.S. as the people in Spain, begin incorporating these simple tips into your diet:

- Eat less processed foods
- Use olive oil instead of butter or margarine
- Eat more fish and seafood
- Eat less red meat
- Drink wine in moderation
- Make grains, fruits and vegetables the center of the plate
- Eat your meals more slowly
- Eat smaller portions of food
- Add physical activity, like walking, into your day as much as possible

Resources:

<http://www.thinkspain.com/hottopics/healthcare/>

<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/sp-spain/hea-health>

<http://www.whatcadiz.com/spain-eating-habit.html> <http://news-spain.euroresidentes.com/2006/10/eating-habits-in-spain.html>

<http://gospain.about.com/od/spanishlife/f/siesta.htm>

<http://www.eyeonspain.com/spain-magazine/eating-habits.aspx>