Nutrition News You Can Use: African Heritage Diet Pyramid features Peanuts

Dr. Andrew Craig, APC Health Consultant, London

The traditional cuisines of Africa are many and varied. Locally-grown peanuts are staple foods: peanut paste as an infant weaning food; boiled inshell peanuts; additions to meat and vegetable stews. Much of the traditional food wisdom of African cultures has been at risk of being lost in our modern day eating habits. Health problems in some communities of the African diaspora have been one consequence. Now the Oldways Preservation Trust has brought the wisdom of traditional African eating patterns to a much wider modern audience with the publication of the African Heritage Diet Pyramid (*). It is a welcome new member of the family of "traditional eating pyramids" (Mediterranean, Latino, Asian, and Vegetarian) which the Oldways Trust has published in recent years, all of which make space for peanuts and nuts.

This latest resource is particularly important to the many millions of people worldwide with African roots. But the good news is bigger than that. The eating pattern the new pyramid recommends would be good for all of us, whatever our ethnic heritage. That's because it emphasises whole, fresh plant foods like leafy greens and colourful fruits; tubers like yams and sweet potatoes; beans of all kinds; peanuts and nuts; rice, flatbreads and other grain foods, especially whole grains; healthy oils; homemade sauces and marinades of herbs and spices; fish, eggs, poultry and yogurt. It advises minimal consumption of red and processed meats, sweets and "convenience foods".

This eating pattern is not only healthy, it is very enjoyable and affordable. Healthy eating and great taste really come together here. As the authors state: "The African Heritage Diet is a way of eating based on the healthy food traditions of people with African roots. This healthy way of eating is powerfully nutritious and delicious, and naturally meets the guidelines that health professionals promote today."

The pyramid singles out peanuts and other nuts as "core African heritage foods" to shop for, prepare, and eat most often. Given the higher risks for metabolic disease, obesity and its consequences amongst African-related population groups, helping individuals to rediscover, buy, prepare and eat more of the traditional diet would be a real step forward in addressing diet-related health problems.

The Oldways Preservation Trust site at the link below has a range of additional information about the new pyramid, including recipes and kitchen tips, summaries of health studies and a recent webinar in which the compilers talk about its usefulness in the context of reducing the risk of diet-related health problems. This work was made possible by a grant from the Walmart Foundation.

* Oldways Preservation Trust (2011), African Heritage Diet www.oldwayspt.org/african-heritage-diet