



# Diabetes Guide to Foods of African Heritage

Of the 23.1 million adults who have been diagnosed with diabetes in the United States, 3 million are African American. A disproportionate number are impacted by diabetes, with as many as one-quarter of African American women over the age of 55 diagnosed with the disease. African Americans also experience greater consequences from the complications of diabetes including increased risk of kidney failure, diabetes-related blindness and amputations. Finding healthy ways to support this population while creating culturally competent and relevant care is critical.

For many African Americans, healthy eating is synonymous with bland and boring. Diabetes care and education specialists can play a role in helping clients understand the choices they make and how it impacts their diabetes. Most importantly, they can work to understand the needs and wants of their African American clients.

## Tips for Culturally Competent Care:

- Don't pass judgment but instead build on people's food and nutrition practices by accentuating the positive aspects of the food they eat.
- Be inquisitive and identify cultural barriers. Ask what healthy eating means to them. You should inquire how and where they get their food and how they include those foods on the plate. Without any context of the individual's reality, it's easy to assume a mother who feeds her family what's available in her neighborhood simply needs someone to explain that fast food isn't the most healthful option.
- Use educational materials representative of the client's ethnicity. The Diabetes Heritage Food Pyramid and the African Heritage Diet Pyramid can be used as cultural models of healthful eating.
- Whenever possible, use visual aids instead of written materials and handouts. Even small language barriers can affect outcomes.

Studies have shown that when people adopt to a more westernized diet, their susceptibility to health problems increases. Reclaiming traditional, cultural cuisines and adopting a healthful eating pattern such as the healthy food traditions of Africa, the Caribbean and the American South have both culinary and health appeal. Additionally, African heritage foods naturally meet the nutrition guidelines the American Diabetes Association recommends: emphasize non starchy vegetables, minimize added sugars and refined grains and favor whole foods over highly processed foods.

## Additional Resources

**OldwaysPT.org** – Creator of the African Heritage Diet Pyramid, this site offers an in-depth overview of the African Heritage Diet as an evidence-based, culturally meaningful, nutrition intervention guide.

**Cultural Food Practices** by Goody CM, Drago L. American Dietetic Association; 2010 This practical guide and accompanying downloadable handouts help RDNs provide culturally appropriate diabetes education and counseling. Covers 15 cultures.

**Diabetes Guide to Enjoying Foods of the World** by Brown-Riggs C, Jones J. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; 2018. This convenient guide can help people with diabetes enjoy all the flavors of the world while still following a healthy meal plan. Practical tips and guidance are offered for 11 popular ethnic cuisines.

**The African American Guide to Living Well with Diabetes** by Brown-Riggs C, Jeffries T. This guide provides a list of over 100 traditional foods from the American South and the Caribbean—foods that aren't easily found in most books of food counts. Caribbean and soul food recipes and a two-week menu plan are also included.

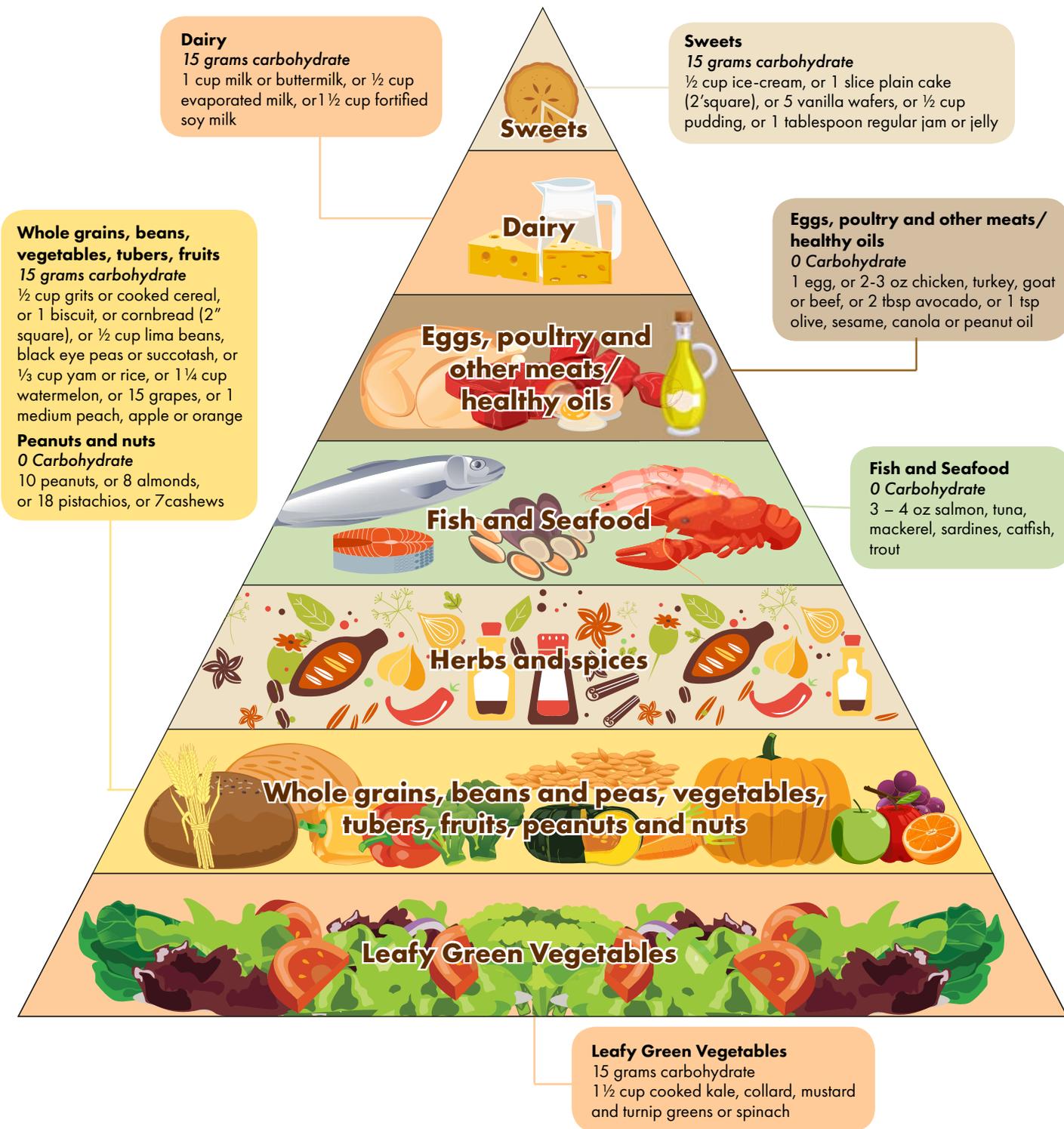
**Office of Minority Health** – Find more resources at [MinorityHealth.hhs.gov](http://MinorityHealth.hhs.gov).

**National Medical Association** – The largest and oldest national organization representing African American physicians and their clients in the U.S. Learn more at [www.nmanet.org](http://www.nmanet.org)

**EthnoMed** – Harborview Medical Center's ethnic medicine website containing medical and cultural information about immigrant and refugee groups. Learn more at <http://ethnomed.org>

# The Diabetes African Heritage Pyramid

The **Diabetes African Heritage Pyramid** is modeled after the African Heritage Diet Pyramid and provides information on the carbohydrate content of various foods. Clients should be encouraged to base their meal primarily on a variety of foods nearest the base of the pyramid.



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