

# Lesson 1: The African Heritage Diet Overview and Herbs & Spices

Lesson 1 is the most content-heavy of all the lessons. It walks students through the African Heritage Diet Pyramid and covers each of the four African heritage regions that the diet is based on (Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and American South). It introduces the idea of global “nutrition shifts” from traditional ways of eating to more modern ways of eating like the standard American diet. And, it invites participants to take the Health Through Heritage pledge – an intention to embrace the African Heritage Diet over the course of the six-week program.

Lesson 1 provides students with the overall framework for what it means to eat traditionally and culturally. It also invites students to talk about their own family food traditions, health and ancestry, in order to make personal connections with the past and with each other.

In addition to setting the foundation for the African Heritage Diet and six-week series, this lesson is the first wakening of your students’ inner cooks by familiarizing them with using spices. Many ATOAH participants have never cooked using fresh or dried herbs and spices before. It also introduces the chickpea, a prominent legume and ingredient in North African cooking.

**Oldways Tip #1: Don’t get overwhelmed by the number of topics to cover – be sure to share each key message and let the class flow naturally.** Each topic in Lesson 1 is designed to engage the class in discussions about personal experiences and background, including: each individual’s ancestry, culture, food traditions and experiences, personal and family health, travel and cooking practices.

Let your students lead the way. If you have a very talkative class, don’t worry if you go over time on the Intro Section. Be a guide to keep things productive and flowing, but also let the group get to know each other. If your students are on the quieter side, then spend more time walking them through the Pyramid and Regional Profiles than the Intro, and launch directly into the spices section, cooking and tasting.

This program is about changing the way people eat and think about “healthy food” by utilizing cultural history and culinary wisdom. If you cover all of the key messages and get your participants cooking and tasting new foods each week, then you will have achieved enormous success.

**Oldways Tip #2: You don’t have to be a culinary historian or world food scholar to effectively teach this lesson.** Some instructors find the regional profiles section of this lesson a bit intimidating. This segment should be fun, imaginative, and stemming from personal experiences. Before you begin, think about the following questions:

- Have you traveled outside the country? If so, where? Have you ever been to Africa, the Caribbean, South America or the Southern U.S.? What was the food like in those places? How was the food different from the standard American diet?

- Have you had any friends that grew up or have lived in the African heritage regions? Have they cooked for you?
- Have you ever eaten at an African, Caribbean or South American restaurant?
- Can you remember garden-to-table meals with your parents or grandparents? How about a childhood friend's family?
- Is anyone in your class from another country, especially from Africa or the Caribbean? Are they first generation Americans? If so, ask them to share their personal experiences, culturally and culinary-wise.

If you've answered "Yes" to any of these, then utilize those experiences that will lend themselves to inspiring your students' curiosity about cultural cuisine. Think about different cuisines that you've had in various regions around the world and the U.S. – were there lots of vegetables? What were the flavors like? How much value was placed on eating together, family and health in those places? Talk about the nutrition and flavors naturally embedded in those experiences and ask your class to share about theirs.

**Oldways Tip #3: Take your time walking through the African Heritage Diet Pyramid.** This lesson segment is probably the most important one to get across, as an umbrella for the rest of the program. Walk through the pyramid slowly, emphasizing that this program focuses on the foods that the pyramid encourages at **every** meal – the plant-based food groups.

**Teacher's Choice Intro Recipe:** Feel free to bring in any African heritage dish you'd like for students to enjoy as class begins, whether it's from the Oldways [recipe search engine](#) or one of your personal favorites. We recommend [Jollof Rice](#) as a nice introduction.

#### **Tips and Comments from Fellow Teachers:**

- We started with the [Oldways] peanut soup – a big hit! Especially meaningful, since many participants talked about peanuts as a part of their family traditions
- We had the class prepare both the rice and chickpea recipes, very hands on. One graduate student from Africa spoke about the spices. Another grad student from Cuba spoke about how her parents cooked.
- Make sure that you highlight all of the key messages for every lesson. Review the key messages at the end of every class, and review them again at the beginning of the following class.
- If you have favorite ways of storing fresh herbs, or growing them at home, definitely share them with the class.
- The class loved the spicy chickpeas. We did a spice tasting prior to cooking – I think it is important to know what a spice tastes like on its own.
- Everybody was shocked and amazed at how little they knew about their heritage and culture.
- We added prayer and scripture related to nutrition from the Bible.
- Lesson 1 is marvelous, but I was glad I had people to help take photos and pass out the dishes. Ideally 2-3 people are needed, especially for this first class.

#### **Additional Recipe** [African Peanut Stew](#)

