

Cultural Food Swap Guide

How to Use: The food swaps below support brief counseling discussions and should be adapted to individual preference and access. The goal is *modification* rather than *replacement* of culturally familiar foods.

Traditional Food or Pattern	Common Clinical Concern	Culturally Responsive Swap or Adjustment	Counseling Language Example
White rice	Glycemic load	Reduce portion slightly; pair with legumes, vegetables or protein	“You don’t have to give up rice—adding beans or vegetables can help steady blood sugar.”
Fried plantains	Saturated fat	Bake or air-fry; mix fried and baked portions	“Could we try preparing them a different way some of the time?”
Flatbreads (naan, pita, roti)	Refined grains	Combine with lentils, yogurt, or vegetables; explore whole-grain versions if acceptable	“Keeping the bread but balancing the plate can support heart health.”
Soy sauce, fish sauce, fermented pastes	Sodium	Use smaller amounts; dilute with citrus, vinegar, or broth	“The flavor stays, but we ease back on salt.”
Ghee, lard, palm oil	Saturated fat	Reduce quantity; blend with unsaturated oils rather than eliminate	“It’s about how much and how often, not cutting it out.”
Sweetened beverages (aguas frescas, bubble tea, sweet tea)	Added sugars	Reduce sweetness gradually; alternate with unsweetened versions	“Dialing down the sweetness over time helps your body adjust.”
Stews and slow-cooked dishes	Sodium, fat	Increase vegetables and legumes; skim fat after cooking	“This keeps the dish familiar but lighter.”
Meat-forward meals	Cardiometabolic risk	Shift portion emphasis: more vegetables or legumes, less meat	“Same meal—just a different balance.”
Desserts tied to celebrations	Weight or glucose control	Smaller portions; less frequent occasions rather than elimination	“Celebration foods still fit—just not every day.”

Evidence Base & Key References

This toolkit was developed using established federal guidance, professional society recommendations, and peer-reviewed literature on culturally responsive care, nutrition counseling, and chronic disease management.

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4. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. *Position Papers and Practice Guidelines on Culturally Appropriate Care and Nutrition Counseling*. Various publications.
5. American Diabetes Association. *Standards of Care in Diabetes*. Annual updates.
6. American Heart Association. *Dietary Guidance to Improve Cardiovascular Health*. Scientific statements and guidelines.
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