

## **The Magic Road: Latino advocacy group pushing return to culinary roots**

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Eating the food your abuelita makes may make you thinner and healthier, a non-profit group argues.

Arroz y frijoles, carne guisada, ensalada de nopalitos, pepian, arroz con pollo not only taste good, but the Latino Nutrition Coalition argues that eating those foods may reduce obesity rates.

Obesity rates among Latinos in the U.S. doubled between 1991 and 2001, from 11.6 percent to 23.7 percent. About 23 percent of Hispanic men are obese, while 27.5 percent of women are obese — higher rates than those of non-Hispanics.

The Latino Nutrition Coalition, a Boston-based agency dedicated to improving Latino eating habits, urges Hispanics to return to eating more traditional foods. They've created a 16-page pamphlet called "Camino Magico" that encourages Hispanics to add more fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains to their diet and to avoid over-processed or prepared foods.

"It's looks like it will be very good useful tool," said Stephanie Marroquin, a registered and licensed dietitian in McAllen. "The fact that it is bilingual really helps."

Marroquin likes that the pyramid encourages people to pick healthy food from options with which they are already familiar. With the regular food pyramid, people are often encouraged to eat food they haven't heard of or that are too expensive for them to purchase on a regular basis, Marroquin said.

Because the recommended foods are foods that most Hispanics are familiar with, Marroquin said she believes patients will be more compliant and will stick to the recommended diet.

Hispanics have been eating a certain diet for thousands of years, and their bodies are accustomed to digesting particular foods, said Liz Mintz, manager of the Latino Nutrition Coalition in Boston.

"When an immigrant comes to a new country they adopt the eating patterns of the country they're in," Mintz said.

This adaptation sometimes results in a loss of culture and, in some cases, weight gain.

"Our goal is to bring food people are comfortable with and reintroduce them into the diet," Mintz said. "To work to help turn the tide on the obesity problem facing Latino-Americans today."

The Latino food pyramid encourages the use of fruit, vegetables and grains.

“In the ideal world, we want 100 fresh, 100 percent traditional,” Mintz said.

She admits though that for many people that’s not possible. Many new immigrants work two jobs, they are straddling two cultures, and have to balance home and work, Mintz said.

Another aspect of the program focuses on exercise. When immigrants lived in their native countries many exercised more because they had to walk to the market or road their bikes to work. In the United States people drive or bus every where, and thus burn less calories. Exercise is something that has to be worked into a schedule not something that is just done as a part of daily life.

“Part of our message is daily activity is very important,” Mintz said.

This is especially true for Latino women, who have a tendency to place everyone else’s need in front of their own.

“Latinas tend to think about other people first,” Mintz said. “Everyone has to be OK before she takes care of herself.”

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Paige Lauren Deiner covers features and entertainment for The Monitor. You can reach her at (956) 683-4425. For this and other local stories, visit [www.themonitor.com](http://www.themonitor.com).

#### Desayuno / Breakfast

- Parfait of fresh fruit – 1/2 cup canteloupe, 1/2 cup papaya, 1 c. low-fat yogurt with 1 Tbsp. honey topping
- Huevo Ranchero – a small tortilla, one fried egg cooked using cooking spray, chile morita (tomato, chile, onion, garlic)
- Café – Bustelo expresso en leche

#### Snack

- One ounce of almonds

#### Comida / Lunch

- V-8 juice – 1 cup jugo de jitomate y vegetales
- Soapa de Monyo – 1 1/2 c. fat-free chicken stock, 1/2 c. cooked fideo (pasta), scallions, jitomate rojo (chopped), 1/2 ounce pulled chicken leg and breast, salt and pepper
- Ensalada de Garbanzos en Aelite with shrimp – 1/2 cup garbanzos cocidos, 1 Tbsp. olive oil, garlic, chiles anchos, 3 small marinated shrimp with allspice and tomato juice, 1 c. lechuga orejona (Romaine lettuce), onion (pre-soaked in salted water), 1/2 ounce low-fat goat cheese
- Café Negro

#### Snack

- One small bag baby carrots

#### Cena / Dinner

- Ceviche rojo – boneless red snapper, marinated (lemon juice, olive oil, V-8 juice, orange juice, onion) with salsa picante, parsley and two whole-grain crackers
- Lomo de Cerdo con Mole – 2 ½ ounces lean center-cut pork rubbed with garlic and pepper, mole (chile pasilla, chile moleto, honey, cacao, ajonoli seeds), topped with queso canesto)
- Yellow rice (½ c. cooked)
- Verduras al vapor (1 c.)
- Leche morada – skim milk, sugar substitute, sweet potato, rice, cinnamon
- Vino Tinto (one 5-ounce glass)
- Café decafeinado

— Cecilia Pozo Fileti, MS, RD, FADA, Latino Health Communications

#### Desayuno / Breakfast

- 1 boiled egg
- 1 piece whole wheat toast
- with a little strawberry marmalade (2 tsp.)
- 2 ounces queso blanco
- 1 cup natural 100 percent orange juice

#### Snack

- A handful of peanuts (1 oz)
- A cup of tea

#### Comida / Lunch

- ½ c. brown rice
- 3-4 ounces baked chicken
- ½ medium baked potato
- 1 c. salad (greens, beets, etc) with lime, pepper and salt
- 1 small sliced banana with melaza syrup

### Snack

- 1 cup hot chocolate
- 1 small whole grain bread roll with a little butter

### Cena / Dinner

- 1 to 1 ½ cups pasta with vegetables and shrimp
- ½ cup cooked broccoli
- 1 cup strawberries with a little whipped cream

— Claudia Gonzalez, MS, RD, LDN

Source: [www.latinonutrition.org](http://www.latinonutrition.org)