

Sudanese Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: Sudan

Primary Language(s): Arabic, English²

Percent of Iowa's Population: The Sudanese are part of Iowa's 3.8% African American population¹

Background

The Meroitic people were the first to inhabit the land that makes up Sudan until three Christian kingdoms came to power in 350 B.C.E. In 641, the Arabs arrived to Sudan and introduced the Islamic faith. During the 1800's, control of Sudan was back and forth between Egyptian/British forces and Sudanese leaders. This lasted until 1956 when Sudan finally became independent. Unfortunately, conflict was still evident between two parts of the country. North Sudan is made up of Arab Muslims while south Sudan is mainly black African. The two groups have strong feelings of dislike for one another which divided the country, and the First Sudanese Civil War broke out and lasted from 1955-1972. The agreement that ended the civil war did not completely resolve the issues between the two parts of the county which caused the Second Sudanese Civil War which lasted from 1983-2005. The Sudanese tend to identify with their tribes instead of their country. Many tribes cross over into neighboring countries. Sudan is one of the twenty five poorest countries in the world due to drought, famine, and foreign debt. Cotton is Sudan's primary export; however the success of the crop depends largely on the climate. The country is divided into twenty six states and each has an appointed governor. ²

Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

The Sudanese live within small communities or villages that are made up of extended family members, and many times extended family members live under the same roof. The family leader is usually a respected elder. The majority of Sudanese families like to live a more traditional lifestyle in which women tend to stay home and take care of the house and family. Men live a more public lifestyle. Women are also expected to help in the field if they live in a rural area. Men and women are usually segregated when it comes to every day meals and social settings. ²

Holidays & Celebrations

Independence Day is celebrated in Sudan on January 1st to remember the day when the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan gained independence as the Republic of Sudan. Unity Day is on March 3rd, and celebrates peace and unity between the north and parts of the south which suffered heavy strife during the civil war. Eid Ramadan is a Muslim religious holiday celebrated in Sudan. Muslims are required to fast for the 30 days of Ramadan. They are not allowed to have any food or drink from sunrise to sunset. There is a celebration at the conclusion of the month of fasting. ²



Kisra, a thin leavened bread, is the staple food of Sudan.⁴

Education and Literacy

Among children between the ages of 5-13, more than 40% of them are not in school. Girls make up the majority of children who are not in school. The adult literacy rate in Sudan is about 58.6%. Poverty, conflict, and lack of awareness of the importance of education are a few causes of the poor education levels.⁵

Meal Patterns

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Sudan.⁶ However, protein energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are a common problem in children under the age of 5. Typical micronutrient deficiencies include iodine, iron, and vitamin A. Out of 1,000 children born in Sudan, 73 of them will not live to see their 5th birthday. Communicable diseases are also a leading cause of death. These diseases include malaria, yellow fever, rift valley fever, guinea worm disease, and HIV/AIDS. Lack of access to safe drinking water and improper sanitation are causes for quick spread of disease.⁷

Breakfast is the most popular meal of the day in Sudan, and they usually begin their day with a cup of tea.³ The Sudanese are very sociable. Meals are eaten around a large, shared tray which includes an assortment of meat, salad, vegetables, and sauce dishes. Meals are eaten using the right hand and often times using flat bread or a stiff millet porridge as utensils. Peanuts, which are known as Ful-Sudani, are a common snack. The Sudanese tend to have a sweet tooth and like to put a good amount of sugar in their tea and coffee and indulge in sugary desserts.⁴

Considerations for WIC

- Breakfast is eaten between 9:00-11:00 every morning, and it is the most important meal of the day in Sudan. Usual breakfast foods include beans, salad, and bread.³
- Meals are eaten as a group with men sitting on one side of the table and women on the other.² Bread is typically used as a utensil for eating instead of a spoon or a fork.⁴
- When discussing WIC foods with Sudanese clients, they should be aware that they are able to purchase beans, vegetables and yogurt which are typically used in soups and stews.
- Sudan is a patriarchal society in which women are considered lower status than men.² This is important to keep in mind when discussing referrals and outreach organizations with Sudanese families. The patriarch of the family will more than likely give the final decision.
- Muslims in Sudan celebrate Eid Ramadan, and they are required to fast from sunrise to sunset for a full month. It is important to note that travelers, pregnant women, sick people, and children under the age of 13 are not required to fast.²



The flag of Sudan consists of 3 horizontal stripes. The red stripe represents the blood of Muslim martyrs; white stands for peace and optimism; and black represents the people of Sudan. The green triangle symbolizes agriculture and the Islamic faith.²

Where Are We Living?

Des Moines has the largest population of African Americans in Iowa at 23,727. Other cities in Iowa with a large African American population include Davenport, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, and Iowa City.¹

Where Are We Working?

About 20.2% of African Americans in Iowa are employed in the manufacturing industry. Educational services, health care, and social assistance are other industries with significant African American employment in Iowa.¹

