

GatherRD

**Asian
Americans
and Pacific
Islanders**
a member interest group of the
Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics
**eat
right.**

Official Newsletter of the Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders MIG

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Nikki Nies, MS, RD

AAPI Chair 2020-2021

In these challenging times, we see the value of community —of being ***gathered***—more than ever. While it may be virtual, we can't dismiss the benefit of these connections. It actually can make the geographical boundaries feel smaller when we use technology like never before.

While many of us are spending more time at home, why not take advantage of AAPI member benefits and community? For example, when you're logged into the newly created **AAPI website** (<https://www.aapimig.org>), engage on our **Member Discussion Board**, register for upcoming **webinars** and find more details on **scholarship qualifications**. Also, get the latest real-time updates on Instagram **@aapi_mig** and **Facebook**.

The Executive Committee has been hard at work planning next year - with more opportunities to network and we hope to see you at FNCE®. We have a great team! We thank you for continuing to be a part of the AAPI MIG community. Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions and concerns **AAPI@eatright.org**.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR



Levin Dotimas

AAPI Communications Chair & Newsletter Editor 2020-2021

Talofa!(Greetings!) **I am so proud to present the first-ever newsletter of the AAPI MIG!** When I was trying to come up with the name for our newsletter, I thought about a unifying characteristic of *all*Asian and Pacific Islander cultures. One word quickly came to mind: community.

When I lived in the California Bay Area, I had the great pleasure of spending time with many of my Tongan and Samoan friends. For them, generosity is second nature. One of the ways they showed this was the lavish meals they graciously shared with me. Serving a feast to their guests represented the importance of being gathered and of making sure that everyone is taken care of. Their kindness taught me to give unconditionally and wholeheartedly. My dear Polynesian friends consider me as one of them and they will always have a special place in my heart.

My dietetic mentor Amy Vu suggested “GatheRD,” a play on the idea of the gathering of our cultures under the common theme of community, with a dietetic twist! I did not hesitate to run with this idea because it perfectly encapsulates what our cultures and our MIG stand for. Even though we were formed by the merging of the Filipino and Chinese MIGs, we hope that the rest of our Asian and Pacific Islander brothers and sisters in the US and around the world will join us in our mission to better our communities through food and nutrition.

A Samoan proverb says “*Ua o gatasi le futia ma le 'umele*” (The fisherman swings the rod while the others paddle hard). May this remind us that we are all together in this great work. I hope that you will enjoy the content in our first issue. Expect a newsletter from us every 3 months. We'll continue to add more content, and we need your help to accomplish this goal. Consider this my invitation to you to the paddle hard while we swing the rod: if you would like to write an article for the newsletter or help in any other way with AAPI, please contact us at AAPI@eatright.org.

Fa'afetai lava! (Thank you very much)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

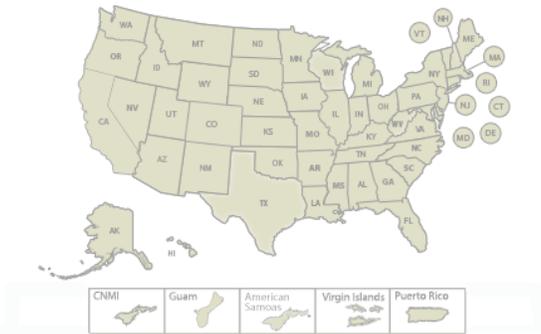


Image courtesy of fns.usda.gov

The United States Department of Agriculture has granted several waivers in response to COVID-19 that increase access to food, specifically for families with children. Implementation of these waivers for SNAP, Child Nutrition Programs, USDA Food Programs, and WIC may vary among states and U.S. territories. You can find the complete list for each state [here](#).

In addition, the federal government authorized a new emergency program called Pandemic EBT. The P-EBT works similar to SNAP, although they are independent programs. The program allows families with school-aged children who participated in the National School Lunch Program to receive money in an amount that is equivalent to the cost of school meals missed if schools were closed for 5 or more consecutive days. Families who receive SNAP may receive their one-time P-EBT before other families since they already have an EBT card. See if your state qualifies [here](#).

The USDA has also created a database to help families find meals near them. Access the map [here](#).

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Representative Engel of New York, and Representative King of New York have introduced the Medical Nutrition Therapy Act of 2020. The bill proposes that Registered Dietitians be reimbursed for MNT under Medicare Part B for the following conditions and diagnoses: prediabetes, obesity, hypertension, dyslipidemia, malnutrition, eating disorders, cancer, celiac disease, HIV/AIDS, and any disease related to unintentional weight loss. [Take action today!](#)



Image courtesy of eatright.org

AAPI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2020-2021



Nikki Nies, MS, RD

Chair

Nikki is Food Consulting Company's Entrepreneur in Residence, a position created to drive and commercialize new products. Her focus is understanding the information needs of our customers and satisfying them through innovative programs, content and services. Nikki's background spans a variety of food and nutrition work for food companies and supermarkets, including work as a regulatory & nutrition manager. She has also created content for several online sites and was the 2018 Texas Academy Northeast Registered Young Dietitian of the Year.



Aimee Estella Reuhs, MS, MPH, RD

Past Chair

Aimee is currently a dietitian in the school nutrition sector where she creates menus and assists with the management of multiple food operation databases for a large school district. She received a dual master's degree in nutrition and public health from Benedictine University. She has worked in various health care settings, and went into the nutrition field because she loves how dietitians can play an important role in health promotion and disease prevention.



Sarah Crulcich, MPH, RD, LD

Chair-Elect

Sarah (she/her/hers) grew up in rural Indiana and is now a proud Houstonian. In addition to nutrition, her background includes behavioral neuroscience and public health. She is passionate about racial equity, food security, and grassroots advocacy. Sarah was recently awarded 2019 Texas Academy SE Region Young Dietitian of the Year. Her hobbies include playing tennis, cheering on the Chicago White Sox, and spoiling her black labrador. Lastly, she is a fierce believer in fostering a healthy relationship with food.



Ivy Gail Molina, MBA, RD, CD

Secretary

Ivy is currently a clinical dietitian in Western Washington. She graduated with a Master of Business Administration from Dominican University and completed her Bachelor of Science in Food and Nutritional Sciences from Seattle Pacific University. She aspires to continue to help people as a dietitian within clinical nutrition and public health settings. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking and hiking with her dog.



Anna Roh, MS, RD, LD

Treasurer

Anna received her BS from the University of Illinois and MS from Southern Illinois University. She currently serves as a member of the medical advisory board for the National Kidney Foundation-Maryland Chapter. She loves to share healthy eating education to prevent kidney disease. She also enjoys working to improve the quality of life for individuals on dialysis and coaching and collaborating with other dietitians. She is currently employed at Fresenius Kidney Care as a lead dietitian.



Katie Chew, MS, RD

Nominating & Awards Committee Chair

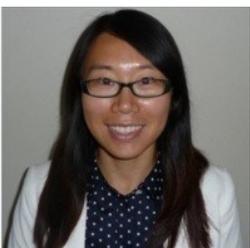
Katie is currently a post-acute care clinical dietitian. She earned her Master of Science in Community Nutrition and completed her dietetic internship at Dominican University. She also earned the "Outstanding Student Award of 2019" for her work ethic, leadership, and extracurricular participation. She is a proud member of Critical Dietetics and continues to advocate for food and health as a human right. During her spare time, she enjoys doing arts and crafts projects, trying new cooking recipes, and traveling with friends.



Christina Liew-Newville, MS, RD, LD, FAND

Nominating & Awards Committee Chair-Elect

Christina has a passion to educate. She is currently the director of the Dietetic Technician Program at Tarrant County College. She received the 2017 Chancellor's Award for Exemplary Teaching. She also provides MNT through her company, Nutrition Joy, LLC. Christina received her master's degree in Nutritional Sciences from the University of Hawaii and completed her Dietetic Internship with Oakwood University. She is currently pursuing her doctorate degree in Education Leadership.



Chen Du, MS, RD, LD, CNSC

Nominating & Awards Committee Member

Chen is currently an Advanced Practice Clinical Dietitian at Parkland Memorial Hospital, while pursuing her doctoral degree in nutrition at Texas Woman's University. She is also an adjunct nutrition faculty at the University of Dallas. She was awarded the Young Recognized Dietitian of the Year by Texas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in 2017. Chen's vision in life is contributing to the advancement of nutrition by mentoring dietetic students, equipping them with good understanding of science, and conducting cutting edge research.



Janice Chow, MS, RD, LDN

Professional Development Committee

Janice is the founder of her virtual nutrition counseling practice, The Mindful Chow. She empowers Asians to replace their cultural obsession with thinness using the Health At Every Size™ approach. She completed her Dietetic Internship and Masters of Science in Dietetics & Nutrition at Tufts University. Janice has 7 years of experience in clinical nutrition, community wellness and nutrition education. She is active on Instagram (@janicehychow). Currently living in Boston, she enjoys cooking different cuisines and traveling with her husband.



Qianhui (Jera) Zhang, MS, MA, RD

Professional Development Committee Member

Jera is currently based in New York City, where she is pursuing her doctoral degree in Behavioral Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her focus is on diet management for digestive diseases, especially celiac disease and the gluten-free diet in China. She also writes for Chinese online blogs about healthy eating. Before starting her dietetic track, she studied sociology for five years and interned at the United Nations and NGOs, which gives her a unique perspective when studying nutrition. She loves knife noodles and dim sum.



Dustin Reed, MS, RD

Membership Committee Chair

Dustin is originally from Lexington, Kentucky, where he spent his childhood on a historic horse farm in the area. He attended the University of Kentucky where he received his Bachelor's and Master's in Dietetics. His current role with Compass is as a Customer Experience Manager on the corporate level. In addition to his work experience, Dustin sits on the executive board for several non-profits and manages political campaigns. He currently resides in Richmond, Virginia.



Rachel Macam, RD

Membership Committee Member

Rachel works as a clinical dietitian with Dietitian Connection. She completed her bachelor's degree and dietetic internship at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In her spare time, Rachel is working on her CDCES certification, enjoys learning Muay Thai and cooking. She can be reached through her website, kitchenandgather.com, or on her Instagram accounts: @RachelMacam_RD, @PerformanceNutritionClub.



Hilary Wu, MS, RD

Membership Committee Member

Hilary is currently the DPD Director at Cal Poly Pomona where she helps to train students to become future dietitians. She is also a clinical dietitian at San Antonio Regional Hospital and skilled nursing facilities in Southern California. She had the opportunity of moving back to Taiwan to work in food service and public health for several years prior to earning her Master of Science in Nutrition from Cal Poly Pomona. In her spare time, she enjoys sipping a cup of coffee with her dogs at home.



Levin Dotimas

Communications Committee Chair & Newsletter Editor

Levin was born and raised in Manila, Philippines, and later moved to the US to Baltimore, MD. He is currently working on his MS in Nutritional Science and Dietetic Internship at Oklahoma State University where he recently completed a USDA-funded human clinical study on the effects of wheat germ supplementation on metabolic markers and the gut microbiota. He recently had the opportunity of serving on the Academy's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Some of his life goals include going on a year-long trip around the world and also spending a day learning from Gordon Ramsay.



Meng Zhang, MS, MPH, RD

Communications Committee Member : Website Coordinator

Meng received her Master of Public Health degree from Tufts University and her Master of Science degree in Nutrition and Health Promotion from Simmons University. She is currently working at a local WIC program providing nutrition education and counseling for women and young kids. As a dietitian, she also loves working with clients of all ages from all walks of life. She believes that "food is the best medicine". In her free time, she enjoys cooking, baking, writing her dietetic blogs, watching movies, and spending time with her family and friends.



Tina Sergi

Communications Committee Member: Social Media Coordinator

Tina is currently working towards her Master of Science in Nutritional Sciences and Dietetic Internship at Oklahoma State University. After completing her Bachelor's degree at the University of New Hampshire, Tina moved to Oklahoma and is now participating in public health research. In addition, she is a certified personal trainer who enjoys working out, going to the beach, and making banana bread. After finishing her MS/DI, she hopes to promote nutrition and exercise in other countries, as well as make an impact on communities within the US.

Glenda Dardashti, MS

Communications Committee Member



Glenda is originally from the Philippines and has resided in Los Angeles, CA. She recently completed her Combined Master of Science in Nutrition with Dietetic Internship at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, NJ and is now preparing to take the RD exam. Her interests are in clinical nutrition with special emphasis in diabetes education and care, as well as integrative and functional medical nutrition therapy. She is very thrilled to continue to learn the ever-changing field and opportunities in dietetics, and start a new career in a sub-acute and rehabilitation facility as a Dietary Supervisor.

Gabrieleene Viray

Communications Committee Member



Gabrieleene graduated cum laude with a Bachelor's of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines. She also had her undergraduate research paper published in a journal here in the USA. Moreover, she is a registered dietitian in the Philippines. With her passion and dedication to her career, she is currently preparing for the RD exam through the reciprocity agreement between the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the Professional Regulation Commission, the regulating body of professional working licenses in the Philippines.

Are you interested in getting involved with AAPI?

We are currently seeking a **DIVERSITY LIAISON**. This position involves collaborating with the Academy's Diversity and Inclusion Committee to develop and implement efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in the dietetic profession. The Diversity Liaison will be writing grant proposals for diversity-related activities. This term lasts for 2 years. If you or someone you know is interested, please send us a message at AAPI@eatright.org.

You're invited to join us in AAPI's Virtual Speed Networking Event!

On Thursday, June 18th at 5-6 pm CST, learn more about other AAPI members, what they are doing and ideas on how we can continue to enhance our value as nutrition leaders. **Please register quickly as the event is limited to 25 people.** The event will be run like a traditional speed networking event, except it will be virtual. Register now using [this link](#). See you there!

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: *Darah Matos*



Name: Darah Matos

Hometown: Fremont, CA

Current school/program: The University of Alabama distance DPD & accelerated masters program in human nutrition

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

Hey everyone! My name is Darah Matos and I am a distance dietetics student at The University of Alabama. I currently live in SoCal with my husband, our silly 6-year-old son, and our dog. I am full Filipino and grew up with traditional Filipino culture practices such as: eating with our hands, *pagmamano*, or greeting our grandparents and elder relatives by bringing the back of their

hands to our heads, and never raising our voices to our elders. I enjoy learning more about nutrition and the differences between cultures. I hope to provide my future patients and clients with reassurance that nutrition does not have to mean letting go of their favorite cultural foods.

What food-related customs do you have?

Filipinos traditionally eat with their hands known as *kamayan*. I grew up eating family dinners this way. Additionally, eating rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner was something I was accustomed to doing growing up.

What led you to study dietetics?

I have always loved learning more about food and nutrition since I was younger. However, I was not aware that dietetics was a specific field of study. I learned more about dietetics when my son was born prematurely and feeding him involved more calculation and work than the typical newborn baby.

He was on TPN for the first 2 days of his life, then required NG tube feedings and high-calorie formula. As he grew, we also worked through food intolerance and aversions that required supplementation of certain nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. His health issues related to being born prematurely required us to seek swallow studies and creative ways to ensure that his nutrition was being met properly.

I credit my experience with being a mom to a premature baby who needed extra care and thought in feeding to sparking my passion for dietetics and its importance in an individual's overall health.

What do you like most about studying dietetics?

I love learning about how nutrition is used to treat and prevent diseases. Learning about nutrition diagnoses and how it can affect the overall treatment of a patient is really interesting to me because it's like trying to make sense of puzzle pieces and putting it all together.

What challenges do you have while studying dietetics?

The challenges I have while studying dietetics is learning by distance. I chose this because it is more flexible for our family's lifestyle while my husband is serving active duty in the military.

However, there are definitely cons to it such as: finding preceptors willing to aid in DPD course requirements, networking with dietetics students and professionals, and learning how to self-teach concepts and information that might require more back-and-forth with professors.

What are your professional goals?

My professional goals include working clinically with either neonatal or pediatric patients or within a military hospital. Due to my personal background as a mom to a premature baby, I understand the challenges that mothers face with feeding and nutrition struggles.

Additionally, I would also like to work at a military-affiliated hospital because I also understand the challenges that military families face when moving from one duty station to another and finding quality

care in the midst of those transitions. I would like to provide quality care and give back to the military community in this way.

What advice would you give to fellow students?

Take it at your own pace. It is easy to compare and see what other students are doing to gain more experience or further their own paths. However, we are all in different seasons in our lives. Some of us have full-time jobs, kids, etc. Focus on what you can do to further your own educational and professional experience while also making sure that you are not burning yourself out. Take time to enjoy the present.

Anything else you'd like to share?

I love connecting with other dietetics students and professionals, follow me on Instagram with my handle @darahmatos to connect!

We would like to hear from you!

Did you know that our MIG website has several Discussion Board topics? AAPI members can log in to aapimig.org and post messages to our Discussion Boards. **Connect now with fellow AAPI members!**

CAREER SPOTLIGHT: *Yi Min Teo*



Name: Yi Min (Elaine) Teo, MS, RD, CNSC

Hometown: Singapore

Current Position & Employer: Clinical Dietitian at Keck Medicine of USC

Tell us a little bit about yourself!

If you are a Singaporean, you are naturally a foodie! Growing up in a melting pot of cultures, I have always loved food, diversity, community and everything in between! Through food you can connect with others through storytelling, filling up your belly, and exploring other cultures' history versus reading a ton of books about it but not knowing how it actually tastes.

The kitchen is my favorite hangout spot and time travel machine where I try to recreate traditional dishes from scratch when I can, and spend time with

my family and friends. Otherwise you can find me on a couch, watching movies and videos being perfectly happy in my quiet space!

What food-related customs do you have?

Mostly Chinese New Year related with ongoing attempts to recreate them in the US annually with the following:

- 1) Grandma's Deep Fried Niangao in batter (Chinese sweet rice cake) for every Chinese New Year!
- 2) Yu Sheng or Lou Hei! Specific to Southeast Asia where we have 10+ symbolic ingredients on a large table lined with plastic, having dozens of people surrounding the table, tossing ingredients into the air with chopsticks and screaming auspicious wishes to each other ("Huat Ah!")

What led you to study dietetics?

When I was trying to figure out what I should major in before starting community college in the US, I wanted to pursue food science since 1) I loved making food taste good, 2) I thought learning the chemicals and science about food would be cool, and 3) I could just lead my best introvert #lablife.

However, I realized that in order to make a greater impact on keeping people healthy and educating folks, I needed to go beyond the lab walls and more into the human interaction realm. I searched 'nutritional sciences' as a degree option and dietetics came up. I realized that dietetics fulfills all the above interests and comes with the additional perks of developing skills to interact and educate others.

How did you obtain your current position?

My current workplace required 2 years of prior clinical experience, which I fulfilled by working at other acute care hospitals. I have always wanted to be at a facility where I can learn from the best in terms of clinical dietetics but also medical management. When I saw a part time opening, I knew that it would be really good experience. I messaged my manager on LinkedIn expressing my interest prior to applying for the position. The rest was history!

What are your main responsibilities?

I am an inpatient clinical RD and mainly see kidney transplant, colorectal, and oncology patients.

Take us through a typical day for your job.

Mornings consist of screening and knowing what my patient load looks like for the day. I then have morning huddles (meetings) with my RD teammates followed by kidney transplant multidisciplinary team, where we discuss all patients on their service. Higher acuity patients are seen and charted usually before lunch. I have my lunch while working especially on really hectic days.

Then, I provide kidney transplant discharge educations for new transplant patients so they know what to take note of nutritionally prior to returning home (my favorite part!). I then finish seeing other patients, complete charting and head home. Sprinkle in some phone calls, questions from nurses and other team members, occasional family requests to explain what nutrition plan you have for their loved ones throughout the day = a day in the clinical RD life!

How does this job bring you satisfaction?

Seeing my nutrition interventions work for patients, empowering patients with knowledge to better understand and nourish their body are the two main drivers for me pursuing inpatient clinical work. I enjoy talking to patients, getting to know them personally (albeit a little challenging in the hospital) and being part of their life journey in healing.

What challenges have you faced in this job and how have you overcome them?

Being an introvert, it has always been challenging to be outspoken and have a ton of confidence in front of a large crowd. Coming to the US to study has definitely helped as I learn to better communicate with others over the years, but this position really demanded speed, precision, multitasking and communication skills all in one!

There are times where I feel that it is impossible for me to get over this hurdle, but I know ultimately the challenge will make me a better clinician and I can then provide better care for patients. I am still learning and honing in these skills with the tremendous support from my manager and team members. Shoutout to the RDs at KMC :)

What advice or tips would you give to aspiring dietitians?

- 1) Be happy, be real and be yourself!
- 2) An African proverb pinned to my wall as a gentle reminder - "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together".
- 3) It's never too late to set yourself up with a strong support network. Your friends, family, partner, or someone who can wipe those tears off and set you back on track.
- 4) Plan for your career and life after getting your

RD! You are going to question yourself multiple times throughout your dietetics journey on why you are doing this, especially with the best combo of schoolwork + personal life + demands from rotations. Having a paper or mind map with longer term life goals (not only career) that span beyond getting the RD credential will remind and ground you when you need it.

Do you know a student or RD/DTR that we could feature in our newsletter?

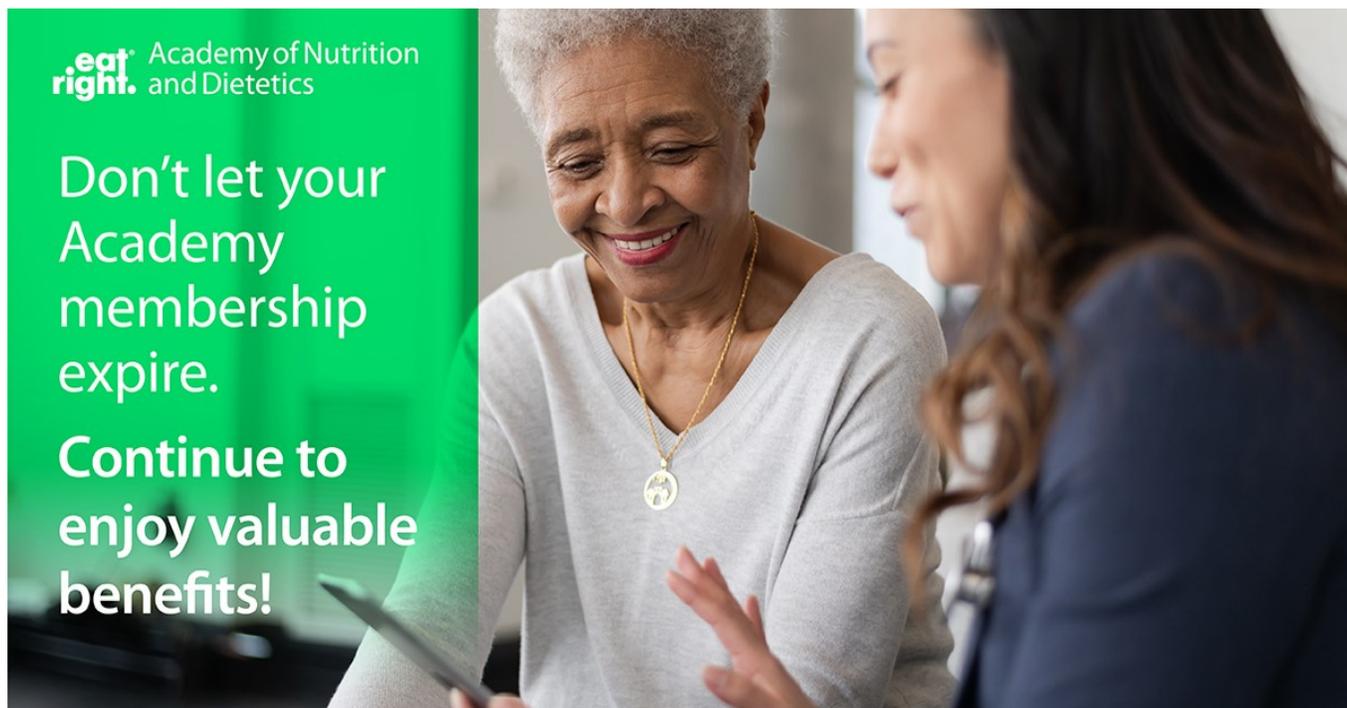
Let us know by messaging us in our Instagram or Facebook accounts or contact us at [AAPI@eatright.org!](mailto:AAPI@eatright.org)

AAPI needs your help in finding webinar speakers!

AAPI MIG offers continuing education webinars to our members as a benefit of membership. We are seeking potential webinar speakers for upcoming webinars. Each webinar is usually 60 minutes. Our budget is small and allows for 2 webinars per year, with a \$200 honorarium per speaker.

Please complete [this form](#) if interested in proposing/presenting a particular topic.

Note: Proposing/applying does not guarantee a webinar presentation. We will keep your contact information in our system and will reach out for future opportunities if your presentation is not selected at this time.



AREA SPOTLIGHT: *The Philippines*

Written by Levin Dotimas, AAPI Communications Chair

In her novel *L'Appel des Arènes* (The Call of the Arenas), Senegalese author Aminata Sow Fall emphasized the importance of being rooted in our identity. She warned that if we detach ourselves from our roots, we will lose our identity, and consequently, our sanity. Although set in her native Senegal, her poignant tale was relevant to my experience as an immigrant from the Philippines.

The pervasive colonial mentality of Filipino culture automatically deems anything American to be superior to any of our own. Although American culture has several desirable qualities, I soon recognized that it did not mean that my Filipino culture is any less. As I embraced American culture, I still felt the need to search for my own identity. Luckily, I did not have to look far because my own culture provided a starting point: our food. In a place where I thought my Filipino identity would eventually dissolve into oblivion, Filipino food reminds me of my origins and keeps me grounded during my stay in my new home.

FILIPINO CUISINE

Although my family has assimilated well into American society, our food at home still reminds us of our life in the Philippines. Rice remains a key component of almost all of our meals. For breakfast, we still enjoy the occasional dried seafood, which could either be *dilis* (anchovies), *danggit* (rabbitfish), *pusit* (squid), or other fish. Spiced vinegar and chopped fresh tomatoes inevitably accompany them to balance the

saltiness. Cured meats like *tocino*, *longganisa*, and *tapa* that remind us of our country's Spanish colonial past are eaten with *sinangag* (garlic fried rice) and fried *itlog* (egg). The two words combined form the term *silog* that has become a popular category of breakfast meals in the Philippines.



Open-air markets such as the one pictured above are common in the Philippines and contain well-organized displays of various fruits and vegetables. Image courtesy of simplegoodandtasty.com

Lunch and dinner reveal an even bigger smorgasbord of Filipino flavors. Salty, sour, and pungent flavors tend to dominate the Filipino palate. Flavors from *toyo* (soy sauce), *suka* (vinegar), *patis* (fish sauce), *bagoong* (sautéed shrimp paste), and *gata* (coconut milk), *calamansi* (Philippine lime) are ubiquitous in Filipino cuisine. Chicken, pork, and beef, and seafood are the most popular protein options, but goat and tofu also make special appearances.

Vegetables and fruits are popular among Filipinos. Depending on the dish, one might encounter *ampalaya* (bitter melon), *sitaw* (long beans), *talong* (eggplant), *patani* (lima beans), *kalabasa* (calabaza squash), *saluyot* (jute), *malunggay* (moringa), *kangkong* (water spinach), *upo* (bottle gourd), or

patola (ribbed loofah). Fruits may be eaten with a meal or as snacks on their own. Some of the favorites are *pinya* (pineapple), *mangga* (mango; especially sweet during the summer months), *atis* (custard apple), *guyabano* (soursop), *bayabas* (guava), *buko* (coconut), *siniguelas* (Spanish plum), *sampalok* (tamarind), and *langka* (jackfruit).

In a place where I thought my Filipino identity would eventually dissolve into oblivion, Filipino food reminds me of my origins and keeps me grounded during my stay in my new home.

Common dishes include *adobo* (chicken and/or pork braised in soy sauce and vinegar and spiced with bay leaves, garlic, and black pepper), *pancit bihon* (stir fried rice noodles with vegetables and meat; a party staple), *lumpiang shanghai* (fried egg rolls filled with ground pork; another staple at parties), *sinigang* (pork or seafood stewed in a sour broth made with tamarind or *calamansi*), *pinakbet* (vegetable stew with long beans, eggplant, bitter melon, calabaza squash sautéed in shrimp paste), Bicol express or *sinilihan* (pork chunks stewed in chili peppers, shrimp paste, and coconut milk), *arroz caldo* (chicken and rice porridge with ginger and multiple toppings), and *dinuguan* (pork blood stew).

Sweets have a special place in the hearts of Filipinos. Like fruits, they can either be a dessert or snack. Choices include *halo-halo* (literally means “mix-mix”, shaved ice with a variety of toppings such as sweet red beans, jackfruit, coconut gel,

shredded coconut sport, rice flakes, flan, and *ube* ice cream drizzled with condensed milk), *turon* (fried banana spring rolls coated with caramelized sugar), *buko pandan* salad (screw pine-flavored gelatin with shredded young coconut in cream), *taho* (silken tofu with brown sugar syrup and tapioca pearls), and all kinds of pastries flavored with *ube* (purple yam).

FILIPINO FOOD IN THE US

Wanting to eat Filipino food in the US can be frustrating and fulfilling, especially because I am so familiar with it. Most ingredients have to be purchased from Asian or Filipino grocery stores which are more common in states with a more significant Filipino population like California and New York. This makes them less accessible and therefore, more expensive than regular ingredients. The same can be said about authentic Filipino restaurants in the US. The best authentic Filipino food is still found in mom-and-pop restaurants or in the homes of Filipinos themselves. Count yourself lucky if you have a Filipino friend who feeds you!



Dried seafood are delicacies in the Philippines and are sold in Filipino grocery stores in the US. Image courtesy of chicago.eater.com.

Fortunately, because Filipino cuisine has not been as commercialized like Chinese, Italian, and Mexican cuisines, most Filipino food in the US is

incredibly authentic. *It slaps*, so to speak. Interest in Filipino cuisine has increased over the last few years, and it has resulted in the opening of a few high-end Filipino restaurants and the slow-burning popularity of *ube*. I am of course happy with the popularity that my native cuisine is attaining, but I hope that authentic Filipino food will not be overshadowed by watered-down versions of it.

FOOD-RELATED CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

We Filipinos have designated snack times between breakfast, lunch, and dinner. My favorite snack time was the one in the afternoon, usually around 3 pm. This is usually when everybody has woken up from their *siesta* (a habit we inherited from our Spanish colonizers), so everyone is in a good mood. At the same time, the bakeries start selling their afternoon specials.

Like our Asian neighbors, we eat rice as a major staple to every meal. Any Filipino party (which, by the way, always includes a buffet of favorite Filipino dishes) will come to a standstill when rice runs out. During meals, forks and spoons are common, although eating with hands is perfectly normal.

Superstitious beliefs around food abound in Filipino culture. During meals, dropping eating utensils on the floor foretells the future arrival of guests: forks signify men, spoons women, and upside-down utensils mean that the guests will be... physically unpleasant. Many Filipinos begin a new year with 12 round fruits, symbolizing prosperity for each month of the coming year. Also, eating noodles is believed to extend one's life. In funeral wakes which normally last about a week in the Philippines, taking food home from the wake is considered bad luck.

THE COMFORTS OF HOME

In *Douceurs du Bercaïl* (The Comforts of Home), another book by Aminata Sow Fall, she exposes the shortcomings of her native Africa, and then reveals the wonderful treasures of her home continent. For most of my life, I saw myself as inferior to the Western world because of my origin and my brown skin. I saw more of my culture's imperfections and less of its beauty. Aminata Sow Fall taught me that despite my insecurities about myself and my culture, there is unparalleled beauty in my upbringing. Through food, I can take pride in my roots even as I see its blemishes and as I embrace another way of life.

For us Filipinos, food is a way of life. It binds our communities, mends broken hearts, celebrates triumphs, and sustains our daily lives. Even though I am in a land where I was not born, I am always grateful to call this my new home where I can continually stay in touch with my roots and avoid the demise that Aminata Sow Fall warned about.

Interested in writing about a place in Asia or the Pacific?

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AAPI@eatright.org!

ARROZ CALDO

Recipe by Levin Dotimas

Arroz caldo is a quintessential Filipino comfort food. Although known by its Spanish name, it is a congee similar to those found in Asia. Despite the hot climate in the Philippines, *arroz caldo* is a hit all year round. A variety of garnishing options also allows you to customize the flavor according to your preferences.

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cooking time: 25 mins

Servings: 4

Ingredients:

2 tsp vegetable oil
3 cloves garlic, chopped
¼ cup chopped onions
1 tbsp grated ginger
1 lb chicken boneless breast or thigh, diced*
1 chicken bouillon cube**
2 cups cooked brown or white rice
6 cups water
salt and pepper to taste

Garnishes:

fish sauce
soy sauce
hard-boiled egg
fried tofu
chopped scallions
fried minced garlic
calamansi juice (lime or lemon juice will do)



Arroz caldo. Image courtesy of panlasangpinoy.com

Directions:

1. Heat vegetable oil in a pot. Sauté the garlic, onions, and ginger for 2 minutes.
2. Add the chicken and the bouillon cube. Cook until the chicken is no longer pink.
3. Pour the water and rice into the pot and simmer until slightly thick.
4. Finish by adjusting the flavor with salt and pepper. Garnish as desired.

*It is more common in the Philippines to eat this with bone-in chicken wings with the skin on, so feel free to use that.

**You can also use low-sodium chicken stock, but remember to decrease or skip the water in this recipe.