

SOUTH INDIAN CUISINE

South Indian cuisine refers to foods from 4 states, namely Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala; also included is Pondichery, which is a union territory. Variations in food practices along with language, culture, heritage and customs are very apparent among the 4 states. There are innumerable specialty foods based on region. However, one may be able to find some common features.

In general, South Indian meals include one or more of the following in different forms:

- Rice, white or parboiled. Since rice is the staple food of South India it is incorporated in various ways.
- Dhals or legumes of various kinds. Most common dhals are toor, urad , gram and mung. The 2 staples, namely rice and different dhals are used in a variety of ways-pounded, ground, fermented, boiled, sautéed and so on. e.g. Idli, Dosa etc.
- Most commonly used animal protein foods are fish, chicken, lamb,mutton and eggs for non-vegetarians
- Vegetables are generally stir-fried or roasted to crispness (curry or porial) or served wet including dhals and coconut (koottu)
- Fruits are usually consumed fresh or as juices
- Desserts largely made from reduced milk (payasam or kheer), jaggery or brown sugar based cooked rice and lentils (sweet pongal, appam,adirasam, jilebi), and other sweetmeats, using clarified butter, nuts and spices like cardamom.
- "milky" coffee or tea
- ghee or clarified butter is served with rice and flavor enhancer. Sesame, peanut and vegetable oils are used in cooking
- salt served separately on the plate for optional use
- water served with meals
- the most commonly used spices are coriander, asafoetida, cumin seeds, fenugreek, ginger, pepper (red, green, and black), turmeric, saffron and other various combinations of these used as curry powders

Shredded coconut, coconut oil, fried plantain chips and fish are more common in Kerala, whereas spicier foods are popular in Andhra, including pickles and chutneys. Cereal-lentil preparations using oil or clarified butter are more common in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Acculturation of Indians in America includes the selection of American or other ethnic foods for main meals or snacks especially by younger generation. Additionally foods from other regions are more commonly used by South Indians, for e.g. puris, samosas, chapathis etc.

Meal Pattern For The Traditional South Indian Client With Diabetes Type 2

Breakfast	Typical	Modified
7.30 A.M.	1 cup coffee with whole milk 3 idlis or 1 plate upuma coconut chutney	1 cup coffee with 1% fat milk 2 slices of whole wheat toast with 2 tsp. Margarine or 2 small idlis or 1 Cup Uppuma 2 table spoon of chutney (tomato or dhal chutney preferable to coconut)
Snack 10:30 A.M.		1 fresh fruit 8 oz. Diluted buttermilk
Lunch 12:30 P.M	3 cups of white rice 1 cup Sambhar 1 cup Rasam 1 cup green plantain curry 1 cup mixed veg.koottu 1 cup curds 1 or 2 fried papadums or potato chips ghee,pickles	1½ cups of brown rice ½ cup Sambhar 1 cup rasam 1 cup string beans curry shredded carrot salad w/lemon ½ cup non-fat yogurt 1 roasted small papadum 2 tsp oil in cooking water to drink
Afternoon coffee 3:30 P.M.	2 murukkus (pretzel like fried) cup coffee	½ cup dry real mix 1 cup coffee w/low fat milk
Dinner 8 P.M	3 cups of cooked rice 1 serving of fish, chicken (for non-vegetarains) 1 cup of sambhar 1 cup fried vegetables 1 cup whole milk curds pickles, papadum etc	1½ cup of cooked rice (brown) or 3 small rotis 3 oz of chicken or fish cury or 1 cup sambhar or whole gram sundal 1 cup stir- fried vegetables with 2 oz. tofu ½ cup low fat yogurt (High in salt) use occasionally 2 tsp oil in cooking
Snack 9:00 P.M.	1 fresh fruit 1 cup ice cream	1 kiwi or a small orange 10 peanuts roasted

Healthy Foods

Starches:

Idli: Steamed, low in fat
Dosas: cooked with minimal oil
Uppuma made from cracked wheat

Meat or meat alternatives

Dhal or sprouted mung dhal
Dhal adais with controlled oil
Chicke tikka
Pan-fried fish with masala

Not so heart-healthy (use less often)

Idlis topped with a lot of oil
Dosas using extra oil or butter
Uppuma made with liberal amount
of oil or ghee

Dhal made with cream or excess ghee
dhal adais made with excess oil
Fried chicken
Fried fish in coconut sauce

Vegetable dishes

Stir-fried green veg., such as cabbage
curry/palya

Mixed veg. Koottu with minimal coconut

Potato roasted curry with a
Lot of oil

Aviyal with a lot of coconut

Dairy

Buttermilk made from skim or low fat milk

Pal koottu or majjige pulusu with low
fat curds

Buttermilk made from whole or 2 % milk

Pachadi(raita) with sour cream

And fried bundhi

Fruit dishes

Plain fresh fruits

Plain jack fruit or mango

Bananapachadi with jaggery & Nuts

Chakkapradaman w/nuts

Tips for changes:

1. *Encourage* use of brown rice instead of white rice. The increase in fiber content will improve glycemic control. There is a general misconception that diabetes must avoid all rice, which is not necessary.
2. Instead of using only rice, select from a variety of grains, such as cracked wheat, oats, and barley.
3. Avoid washing rice several times before cooking or cooking in excess water and draining.
4. Keep in mind that the recommended portions are for the cooked product where applicable.
For e.g. 1 serving of dhal = 2 Tbsp. of uncooked dhal
1 serving of rice = 3 Tbsp. of uncooked rice
This is important because the finished product may vary greatly in consistency.
5. Try to cook with minimum amount of oil. Preferred oils are olive, or canola, as they are high in monounsaturated fats.
6. While using potato, green plantain or other starchy vegetables, remember to cut down on the amount of rice eaten. Smarter thing to do is selecting a green vegetable more often than starchy ones.
7. Use green vegetables more freely and learn to cook them in a small amount of oil. Salads are good with any meal. Simple lemon or vinegar dressings may be freely used.
8. Switch over to skim or 1% low fat milk instead of whole milk. This will reduce the saturated fat content in the diet.
9. Avoid frying of snack foods; learn to look for recipes, requiring dry roasting, baking etc. Remember people with diabetes are more susceptible to high cholesterol in their blood and heart disease. Practice low fat cooking methods, using non-stick pans.
10. Use only lean cuts of animal proteins and practice correct portion sizes. Avoid using more than 3 whole eggs/week. Egg whites are okay. For the Vegetarians, try to incorporate tofu or soy bean curd in various recipes to improve the protein quantity of the meal.
11. Pickles, chutneys, papadums etc are very high in sodium. People with hypertension must take note that table salt, baking powder, and baking soda are sources of sodium and therefore must be used carefully.
12. Desserts must be restricted to fresh fruits; artificially sweetened low fat desserts made from allowed foods may be used occasionally.
13. Drink plenty of water, at least 6 to 8 cups a day.

Weekend and Party Planning

South Indians are very similar to other immigrants in trying to entertain and relax on the weekends. Food becomes an important part of the social gatherings. Quite often, festivals and holidays are celebrated on the weekends with friends. Pot-luck dinners are very popular. Men may indulge in alcoholic beverages while women generally limit themselves to sodas and juices. For the person with Diabetes, it is important to plan ahead mentally about the right choices and portion sizes. Bringing in adish that will be right for you is a good idea.

Party meals consist of several varieties of rice, vadas, bondas, vegetables prepared with liberal quantities of coconut, oil, nuts and legumes. Fried snacks, roasted nuts, potato chips, papadums and chutneys make the feasts mouth watering and of course calorie-laden! Desserts of various kinds appropriate to the celebration are also brought in, in addition to cakes and doughnuts to satisfy the palate of the younger generation.

Nirmala Ramasubramanian, MS, RD, CDN, CDE has extensive experience in acute care dietetics. She is currently working as the Clinical Research Coordinator at Diabetes Care and Information Center, Flushing, New York. She may be reached at 718-969-1827 or through email: neemarama@hotmail.com

References

1. India & Pakistani Food Practices, Customs, and Holidays. American Dietetic Association. American Diabetes Association Inc.
2. Chandra Padmanabhan. DAKSHIN: Vegetarian Cuisine from South India, Angus & Robertson Publishers.