

Healthy, Ethnic Cuisines for Our City's Diverse Older New Yorkers



The City's older adult centers are open for indoor activities and meal services. Meals served at centers are healthy, nutritious, and culturally aligned with their neighborhood's population.

New York City is back in full swing! After more than a year of a broad shutdown of businesses and public gatherings, we can now enjoy the things we love to do such as going to restaurants, sports events, and even Broadway shows. And for older adults, the reopening of older adult centers is certainly one of the most exciting news to celebrate. These centers are community hubs that bring older New Yorkers together for socialization and engagement.

When centers were physically closed during the pandemic, we heard from many

older adults that they missed the centers' fun activities such as chair yoga and music workshops, seeing their friends, and the sense of community that dining together brings.

Congregate meal service at centers not only provide comradery, they also provide good, nutritious food. And in many of our centers, these meals reflect our City's diversity.

From traditional Chinese fish congee to the flavorful Caribbean oxtails, these culturally aligned dishes are served at centers that are

located in neighborhoods with large ethnic and immigrant populations. Just to name a few examples: the Krakus Luncheon Club Neighborhood Senior Center in Greenpoint, a traditionally Polish neighborhood, serves cheese pierogies with sour cream. In Queens, the Korean Community Services Corona Neighborhood Senior Center serves bean sprout and kimchee soup.

New York is a multi-cultural city and, over the years, our older adult population has become more diverse. Since 2000, the City's Latino population nearly doubled, African Americans increased by 59%, and the Asian population nearly tripled – growing more than 180%. Having services and meals that reflect these changing demographics is important for our agency.

Food is an important part of culture and it also represents who we are. Every culture has a unique cuisine characterized by distinctive ingredients and cooking techniques. Being able to enjoy the food of our cultural heritage holds a personal value. My mother used to cook *arroz con gandules* (Puerto Rican rice with pigeon peas) on special occasions. That delicious dish is something that immediately brings happy memories.

Meals at older adult centers are not only culturally aligned, but are also healthy and nutritious. The Department for the Aging's Nutrition Unit works closely with centers to review meal recipes and ensure that they are nutritious and meet dietary guidelines and

standards, such as filling half of the plate with fruits and vegetables. Meals are also certified by registered dietitians and provide a minimum of one-third of the necessary daily nutrients of vitamins, minerals, proteins, fat, and carbohydrates. Today, nearly all our centers have reopened and are serving more than 62,000 meals a week.

As many of us know, healthy eating promotes longevity, vitality, and good health. To help older adults eat healthy at home, our dietitians also regularly conduct a variety of nutrition education workshops and healthy cooking classes. For those who enjoy cooking, be sure to watch our healthy cooking demonstrations on our Facebook channel. Our recent demonstrations feature delicious [Summer Rolls](#) (presented in Cantonese) and [Avocado Toast](#).

For older New Yorkers who haven't visited [an older adult center since they reopened](#), [I invite you to stop by the center nearest you](#) and say hello. Come and enjoy a hot meal and meet some new friends along the way.



**NYC Department for the Aging
Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez**