Staying in the Circle of Life

Traditional Food Principles


Food is at the center of culture

People traditionally harvested, processed, prepared and shared meals together. Our ancestors understood that food is precious, a gift from nature, and is necessary for our existence. Individuals can become nourished as they partake in a fundamental aspect of survival with the ones they love, and the family is also strengthened. Eating collectively can also be a time when culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through conversation and leading by example.

Honor the food web/chain

Living in harmony with nature is a Native teaching. As we know, everything is connected. It must be remembered that the ramifications of polluting our soil and our water can be seen in the health of plants, animals and ultimately, ourselves. We have a responsibility to maintain the health of our food system as our ancestors did, so that we pass down a world that will support generations to come.

Eat with the Seasons

A traditional food diet is diverse and is based on the seasons. The power of being in the moment and harvesting what is available ensures that a variety of foods will be on the menu. Seasonal foods prepared people for seasonal changes as well. For example, eating berries when they are ripe in the fall boosts your immunity, helping you to get through the flu season.

Eat a Variety of Foods

Our ancestors ate more complex foods and received a greater variety of vitamins and minerals in their diet. Eating many types of foods also helped preserve the diversity of the environment, which helped uphold the entire ecosystem by avoiding over harvesting of any one resource. We know that healthy ecosystems are diverse ones. Now that people are eating relatively few foods due to mass monocrops like corn, wheat and soy, we are losing environmental diversity along with diversity in our diet.
Traditional Foods are Whole Foods

Traditional foods are “real foods” that have grown in nature. They are not industrialized foods that have been refined or contain additives, dyes or chemicals. A whole food is alive and consists of one ingredient: itself. If you read the ingredients list on a pre-packaged food and do not understand the words, you probably should not eat it. You should not need a science degree to understand food labels. If you cannot picture an ingredient growing in nature, it most likely is not food at all.

Eat local foods

Plants breathe, respire and require water. So after they are cut off from their food source they begin to die, which means they lose nutrients and flavor. This makes eating fresh, local food especially important. Eating local is also good for the environment, as it reduces the amount of fossil fuels used to get the food to us and helps support our local economy.

Wild and organic foods are better for health

Wild foods are denser in nutrients and lower in calories. Processed and refined food tends to provide empty calories and may only offer a part of a food. This contributes to weight gain as our body, in its natural wisdom, craves all the missing parts of processed and refined foods. Organic foods also guarantee that we are getting all the nutrients essential for our bodies. Intensive agricultural practices deplete mineral content in the soil and therefore in the plants that grow from the soil. When we eat wild and organic foods, we are supporting a healthier body and environment.

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Cook and Eat with Good Intention

The way we eat is just as important as what we eat. We are frequently eating while on the go and hurrying on to the next task. This takes the pleasure out of eating our food, and it does not allow sufficient time for our body to relax enough to savor and digest, leaving us hungry for more.
Promote Generosity

Generosity is a value inherent to northwest Native culture, which includes both giving and receiving. People often express gratitude for the abundance of the land and water, and they pass that gratitude on by sharing. In potlatch and other ceremonies families work hard to give food and other items away. When we harvest native foods for elders or those in need we are caring for the health of our community. It is through giving, not through acquiring money or things, that we become truly wealthy.

Cultivate Food Sovereignty

People Food sovereignty is at the core of tribal sovereignty. It is the inherent right of a community to have access to healthy, culturally appropriate food. When our ancestors signed the tribal treaties they made sure that we would have native foods for generations to come. Each time we exercise our right to harvest native foods we strengthen cultural identity, relationship to land and to our community.