

NATIVE NUTRITION

*Building strong
bodies and
healthy futures*





WHAT'S INSIDE

- 4 How food breaks down
- 6 Reading a food label
- 8 Native food plate
- 9 Serving sizes
- 10 Ancestral foods
- 11 Modern additions
- 12 Rules for shopping
- 13 Tips & tricks for kids
- 14 Community resources



MIND, BODY & SPIRIT

When Native people consume the food of the ancestors, a spiritual connection is awakened and recharged. Ancestors depended on the changing seasons and their diets reflected that.

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In many nations, harvest ceremonies were celebrated, songs were sung, dances were danced, and words of thanksgiving were recited to all the plants and animals who sacrificed their lives to nurture the people's existence. Today, we can reestablish optimum health of individuals, families, communities, villages and nations by re-Indigenizing our diets.

By reflecting on our ancestors' diets, we can begin to revitalize our spiritual relationship to Mother Earth. For Native people, strengthening that relationship enables us to see the wisdom of our ancestors and the value of our identities and lives. Recognizing the nutritious food that the earth provides helps us to better nourish ourselves and care for our planet.

This guide can help Native people to care for their bodies by learning about the food we consume and the nourishment it provides.

Mariah Gladstone, Blackfeet

Learn more about Mariah's efforts to re-Indigenize Native diets through food education. Visit the website at: www.indigikitchen.com





HOW FOOD BREAKS DOWN

When food is eaten, it starts breaking down into smaller pieces in the mouth, travels into the stomach and eventually becomes nutrients that go through the wall of the small intestine into the body. Proteins, carbohydrates and fats are nutrients that provide energy and sustain health.

PROTEINS

All proteins build, maintain and replace tissue in the body to make strong muscles, heart and bone. The body also needs protein to fight disease and infection. Proteins are found in both animal-based and plant-based foods.



One-fourth of your plate should be filled with animal-based, protein-rich foods. Healthy animal protein sources include chicken or turkey breast, wild game meat, buffalo, fish, cheese and eggs. In addition to protein from animals, there are plant-based proteins, called *carbohydrates*, that also contain starch.

CARBOHYDRATES

Carbohydrates are the main source of energy for the body. Healthy carbohydrates are often called *unrefined carbohydrates*. They are found in food that comes from plants in their raw form, without extra processing. *Unrefined starches* – a form of unrefined carbohydrates – are found in foods like corn, peas, potatoes, pumpkin, beans and whole grains.

Many prepackaged foods and beverages (like cookies, candy, soda, ice cream, chips and other snacks) are known as “junk foods” because they fill us up with unhealthy carbohydrates. They are often called *refined carbohydrates* because they are processed in a factory.

Whether healthy or unhealthy, all carbohydrates break down into glucose, which is a form of sugar. We need glucose to provide energy for every cell in the body. However, eating too many carbohydrates and junk foods can cause excess glucose to build up in the body. This increases the risk for diabetes, heart disease and cancer.



Fill almost half your plate with non-starchy vegetables, which are the best source of healthy carbohydrates. Non-starchy vegetables include broccoli, spinach, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, Brussel sprouts, mushrooms, lettuces, asparagus, collard greens, kale, beets, radishes, turnips, artichokes, onions, cauliflower and peppers.

In addition, a serving of healthy fruit can be included with each meal. Healthy fruit includes any fresh, frozen or canned fruit (without added sugar). Less healthy fruit options, like dried fruit, fruit juice and canned fruit in syrup, should be eaten less often.

One-fourth of your plate should be for natural (unrefined) carbohydrates. Examples of these are starchy vegetables (potatoes, yam, corn and peas), beans (lentils, lima, kidney, pinto, black, etc.) and whole grains. *Whole grain* means the entire seed of the plant is used and none is wasted. Examples of whole grains include brown and wild rice, quinoa and amaranth.

FATS

Fats, which provide energy for the body, may be either plant-based or animal-based. Except for coconut and palm oil, plant-based fats are considered healthy fats when eaten in moderation. Plant-based fats include nuts, peanut or almond butter, seeds, avocado, plant oils and margarine.

Animal-based fats are considered unhealthy fats. They may increase the risk of many diseases, so should be eaten less often. They include fat that is found in four-legged animals like pigs and cows. Unhealthy fats are found in whole and 2% milk, butter, pork and beef products like hamburgers, hot dogs, bacon, sausage and ribs.

One serving of healthy fat can be included with each meal but should be limited to one tablespoon of oil, nut butter or margarine, or one ounce of avocado, nuts or seeds. *Learn more about serving sizes on the next pages!*



HOW TO READ A FOOD LABEL

Except for raw foods like meat, fruit and vegetables, most grocery store foods have a Nutrition Facts label. It tells you what the product is made of, and the type and amount of each nutrient found in the food. Raw foods do not have a food label but form the base of a healthy diet.

DON'T LET INGREDIENTS FOOL YOU

The *Ingredients list* is another important part of the food label. Ingredients are in descending order: The one in the highest amount is listed first and the one in the smallest amount is listed last.

Be sure to check Ingredients list to see where sugar appears. Limit foods with sugar in the first few ingredients, and don't be fooled! Sugar has many different names. It can also be called high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, sugar cane, sucrose or glucose.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

In this example sugar is the second ingredient, which means this food has a lot of it. But each ingredient in orange is also considered sugar, so this product may not be the best choice!

Ingredients: Whole Grain Wheat, **Sugar**, Raisins, Almonds, Corn Bran, **Corn Syrup**, **Brown Sugar Syrup**, Partially Hydrogenated Cottonseed And/or Soybean Oil, Salt, Glycerin, **Molasses**, Corn Starch, Soy Lecithin, Trisodium Phosphate, Natural and Artificial Flavor. BHT Added to Preserve Freshness.

CALORIES & SERVINGS

Everyone is different, but the average body needs about 2000 calories per day. Calories on a food label are calculated for just one serving (one portion), not the whole package or container. For example, on this food label only 2/3 of a cup is recommended at one time. If you eat the whole container, you would eat eight times as many calories!

PERCENT DAILY VALUE

The Daily Value is how much of a specific nutrient you need to eat in a day. Percent (%) Daily Value tells you how much of a nutrient is in one serving of that food compared to the amount you need each day. For example, if a food has a Daily Value of 20% for calcium, it has one-fifth of the calcium you need in one day.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	2/3 cup (55g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	230
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 160mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 37g	13%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 3g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 235mg	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

CHOOSE FOODS WITH 10% OR LESS OF THESE

Look for a Daily Value of 10% or less for these nutrients that increase the risk of disease: saturated fat, sodium, added sugars and cholesterol.

CHOOSE FOODS WITH 10% OR MORE OF THESE

The % Daily Value for fiber, vitamins and minerals should be 10% or more to be considered a good source of that nutrient.

Fiber helps keep the digestive system healthy by moving food along and can help prevent certain types of cancer.

Vitamins and minerals are necessary for strong bones, a healthy immune system and growth.

NATIVE FOOD PLATE

Starches & Whole Grains

- Eat traditional grains whenever you can (wild rice, amaranth and quinoa). Potatoes, beans, corn, yams and peas are considered starches.
- Limit “refined” foods like white rice, bread and pasta. They lack natural nutrients and fiber, and often contain added sugar.

Non-Starch Vegetables

Fruits

- Fill up to half your plate with green, leafy, non-starchy vegetables at each meal.
- Eat what is in season: Buy a variety of types and colors of fresh, local vegetables when possible.



Proteins

- Choose lean proteins like chicken or turkey breast. Limit fatty proteins like beef and pork.
- Avoid factory-processed, packaged or cured meats which are high in sodium and fat.
- Fish is one of the best proteins. Try eating fish instead of meat 2x per week.

Healthy Fats

- Use plant oils such as olive, canola, sunflower and grapeseed oil.
- Limit unhealthy fats like butter, coconut, palm oil or shortening.
- Nuts and seeds are a good source of healthy fat when eaten in moderation. Pay attention to serving size!



SERVING SIZES

For each part of the plate, you can use everyday objects to estimate a serving size. Be sure to read serving sizes on a food label to avoid overeating, which can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of many diseases.



**2 Thumb Tips =
1 Tablespoon**
Use for measuring
healthy oils



**Baseball =
1 Cup**
Use for measuring
one serving of
fruit



**Golf ball =
1 Ounce**
Use for measuring
one serving of
nuts or seeds



**Female Fist =
1 Cup**
Use for measuring
non-starchy
vegetables



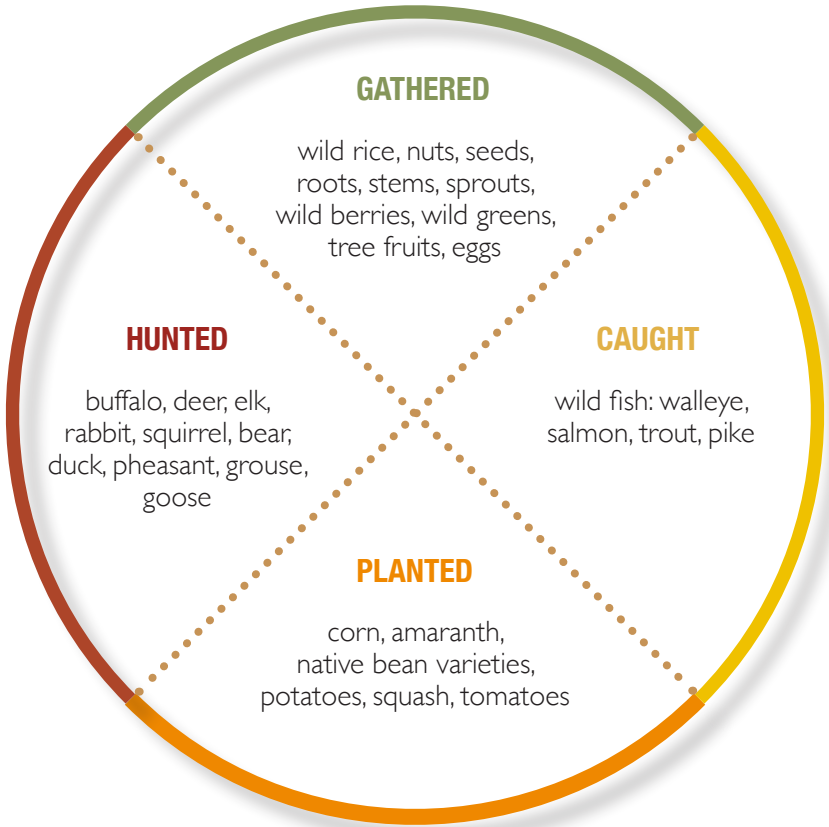
**Deck of Cards =
3 Ounces**
Use for measuring
one serving of
protein like meat
or fish



**Lightbulb =
1/2 Cup**
Use for measuring
whole grains and
starchy vegetables

ANCESTRAL FOODS

The *ancestral diet* – the foods Indigenous people ate before colonization – honored the seasons and was healthier than any modern diet. There were no processed foods, no sugar, no wheat, no dairy and no high-fat animal products. The ancestral diet was high in lean protein primarily from plants and hunted animals. It was low in salt, and contained mostly plant foods indigenous to the land. Fat came from seeds, nuts and animals.



Did you know?

Indian fry bread is not ancestral! Fry bread originated when Native ancestors were forced to move onto reservations, losing control of their food systems and relying on government rations for survival. Among the rations were refined ingredients used to make fry bread. There are other ancestral foods made from grain that can be used in place of fry bread that are much healthier and honor the traditions of the ancestors.



MODERN ADDITIONS

Modern foods can provide healthy additions to a native diet. Notice dairy products are not listed. Dairy was not part of an ancestral diet so it should be used in moderation. Many nutrients in dairy products, such as calcium, are found in other food sources like the examples listed below. Choose low-fat dairy options when possible (1-2 servings per day, maximum).

Meat & Eggs: chicken, turkey, fish and local eggs

Avoid meat that comes from a factory. Eat locally harvested food when possible.

Grains & Starches: whole grain oats, whole grain bread, amaranth, corn, quinoa, barley, brown rice, yams, potatoes, peas, corn, all bean and lentil varieties

Non-Starch Vegetables: spinach, arugula, kale, leafy greens, onion, peppers, carrots, string beans, cauliflower, broccoli, celery, mushrooms

Herbs: dill, mint, basil, parsley, oregano, cilantro

Fruit: oranges, grapefruit, peaches, plums, berries, cherries, pears, apples

Fish oil was traditionally used for cooking. Modern alternatives like olive oil and canola oil are the healthiest types to cook with.

Butter and lard should be used in moderation.

Avoid fried foods.

RULES FOR SHOPPING

Keep these simple food rules in mind when you shop for groceries:

- 1** Choose foods that your great-grandmother would call “food.”
 - 2** Eat more foods with five or less ingredients on the food label. If you cannot pronounce some of the ingredients, look for a different brand.
 - 3** Look for foods that do not list sugar in the first three ingredients, especially if it is called “high fructose corn syrup.”
 - 4** Shop on the outside aisles where fruits, vegetables and meat are found. Most processed food is in the middle of the store.
 - 5** If it was grown in the earth, eat lots of it. If it was processed or made in a factory, use it less.
 - 6** If fresh fruits and vegetables are too expensive, buy frozen or canned. Rinse canned products before use to remove extra salt and sugar.
 - 7** Limit food that you see on TV or at gas stations, or that is delivered through the window of your car. Choose the least processed options.
 - 8** If you are able, buy fresh fruits and vegetables from a community garden or neighbor. Buy in bulk and freeze what you cannot eat for the winter months when fresh produce is harder to find.
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DRINK WATER

Calories and sugar hide in drinks like soda, fruit juice and sports drinks. Water is best.

Add flavor with fresh berries or a fruit slice. Or, try bubbly water for something more refreshing.



TIPS & TRICKS FOR KIDS

Children's health and growth is affected by what they eat. Eating habits are formed very early in life, so it is important to teach children to eat well from the time they are babies.

Children love sugar and it is hard to say “no” to sugary drinks and food. However, sugar can cause problems like weight gain, attention issues and behavior problems. Natural sources of sweetness – like fruit – are better choices for children (and adults too)!

For babies, nothing but breast milk or formula should be served in a bottle. Putting juice or soda in a bottle can cause tooth damage as the child grows, and can be very painful.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

The easiest way to help children make better food and drink choices is for the adults in their lives to make better choices too.

TALK TO KIDS ABOUT FOOD

Talk about the foods you serve. Mention their tastes, smells, textures, colors and how they help fuel the body. For example, when eating strawberries talk about the bright red color, the bumpy, seedy texture and the sweet smell and taste. Talking about food helps curious children connect to it and can help kids be ready for new tastes.

Create a happy, positive home by eating together as a family. Mealtimes are a good time for parents to teach children about new foods, show them how to eat them and share stories about native traditions.





COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Building strong bodies and healthy futures starts with what we put into our bodies. On and off the reservation, there are resources to help families gain access to a consistent supply of healthy food.

For further assistance or help with individual challenges, contact FAST Blackfeet (listed below) for additional resources and recommendations to.

FOOD ACCESS

Blackfeet Food Pantry Program

Offers food commodities for low income families and individuals
(406) 338-7340

FAST Blackfeet

Nonprofit organization providing food access resources for families
fastblackfeet@gmail.com

Heart Butte Senior Center

Free lunch served to senior citizens. Lunch served for a fee to those who are not senior citizens.
(406) 338-2222

Blackfeet Eagle Shields

Free daily lunch to those ages 60 and older
(406) 338-7257

FREE MEALS

Medicine Bear Shelter

Provides hot meals for those in need plus counseling and referrals to appropriate agencies
(406) 338-7842

SOCIAL SERVICES

Blackfeet Food Program (FDPIR)

Supplemental food staples for eligible low-income families
(406) 338-7340

SOCIAL SERVICES

Blackfeet WIC

Provides supplemental foods, nutrition education and health care referrals to pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants and children to the age of 5.

By appointment.

(406) 338-5311

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Food staples for eligible low-income families

(406) 338-7340

Blackfeet Manpower

Offers a financial assistance program for those determined eligible and in need of food, shelter and utilities

(406) 338-2111

Glacier County Office of Public Assistance

Assists people in need of public assistance, including SNAP, Medicaid, child care and financial grants

(406) 338-5131

EDUCATION

Indigikitchen

Education on ancestral eating and indigenous traditions, including locally sourced recipes

www.indigikitchen.com

The Piegan Institute

Educational programs for kids through gardening and Blackfeet language immersion

406-338-7740

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Blackfeet Headstart

Early childhood education, health promotion, parental support

(406) 338-7370

School Backpack Program

Offers children nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to take home and eat on weekends

(406) 338-7952

Southern Piegan Health Center

K-12 school-based care

(406) 338-7912

HEALTH CARE

Indian Health Service

Public health, primary care, nutritional counseling, emergency services

(406) 338-6100

Southern Piegan Health Center

Primary care services, nutrition counseling, diabetes center

(406) 338-7912

PUBLIC HEALTH

Montana Medicaid Enrollment

Health care benefits for eligible low-income Natives. Offers wider access to care providers outside IHS.

(406) 338-6451

Tribal Public Health Department

Health care benefits and resources for eligible low-income Natives

(406) 338-6317

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COLLABORATORS

Indigikitchen
The Sioux Chef
FAST Blackfeet
IHS Browning Service Unit
University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

CONTENT SOURCES

The content in this guide reflects combined evidence-based dietary recommendations from Harvard University, the USDA and the American Diabetes Foundation. It has been adapted for North American Indigenous traditions and culture.