

Can traditional foods help prevent and treat diabetes?

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RD, LD, Siletz Tribal Head Start Nutritionist

As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. This segment focuses on chronic disease such as diabetes and the benefit of traditional foods.

As Native people lost access to land for deer, fish and other traditional foods, they were introduced to pig fat, wheat and rye flour, milk and sugar. These changes in cultural practices appear to be at the foundation of the rapidly growing epidemic of diabetes, as well as heart disease, substance abuse, violence, cancer, attention deficit disorder and depression.

Indigenous people all over are restoring their traditions and I believe this is essential to preventing and reversing diabetes.

Tribal communities that still have access to traditional foods and practice methods of traditional preparation rarely see diabetes. Two essential strategies to prevent diabetes and maintain good health are to prepare foods and gather traditional foods (and their nutritional equivalents) while applying principles of traditional nutrition.

Foods from the environment in which we live provide physical, emotional, mental and spiritual nourishment. Where there is imbalance, there are wounds in the spirit that ultimately manifest as a chronic disease condition, such as diabetes.

Diabetes is an imbalance of the different organ systems in the body that normally work together to maintain a certain level of glucose (sugar) in the blood.

Insulin is a key part of this imbalance. It acts as a messenger to coordinate food energy. In pre-diabetes (or insulin resistance), the cells become less responsive.

Traditional medicine includes knowledge of medicinal plants, animals, foods, the elements, rituals, spirit ways and touch that have been acquired over thousands of generations. Integrative medicine recognizes the wisdom and knowledge of both traditional and conventional methods with a holistic approach.

Authentic foods, diet and nutrition are critical in reversing chronic disease and maintaining health. It is important to note that current USDA nutrition recommendations do not represent the composition of the foods that were indigenous to this Northwest region.

The Salish Food Mound, described by Dr. Leslie E. Korn and Dr. Rudolph C. Ryser, is comprised of 33 percent leafy greens, berries and fruits; 45 percent meat, fish and fowl; 20 percent fats and fish oils; and 2 percent roots and sweets.

I believe that transitioning back toward this diet, along with a holistic approach, will be instrumental in preventing and treating diabetes and other chronic diseases.

In the months to follow, I will expand on aspects of authentic foods, diet and nutrition with emphasis on the Salish Food Mound, addressing healthy fats and oils, and looking at benefits and disadvantages of indigenous foods and introduced foods.

Resources

Preventing & Treating Diabetes Naturally The Native Way by Leslie E. Korn, Ph.D., MPH and Rudolph C. Ryser, Ph.D., 2009, DayKeeper Press, Olympia, Wash.

Feeding the People Feeding the Spirit – Revitalizing Northwest Coastal Indian Food Culture by Elise Krohn, Valerie Segrest and the Northwest Indian College, 2010

Insulin Resistance & Chronic Disease Prevention Symposium, April 18, 2013, at the Squaxin Island Museum, sponsored by the Northwest Indian College

To illustrate the nutritional concepts, I offer a modern-day, slow-cook stew recipe suitable for busy families.

Please let me know what you think of these recipes. Siletz Tribal Head Start offers my time at no cost to you to support family nutrition over the telephone. Please contact me if you have nutrition concerns about your Head Start child – 503-588-5446.

Venison Stew

Ingredients

2.5 pounds venison, cut in 1" cubes or less (can substitute with other meat such as pork shoulder or beef pot roast)

Marinade

2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
6-8 dried juniper berries
3 garlic cloves – crushed
¼-½ cup blackberries (or 1 tablespoon honey)
½ tablespoon rosemary
Salt and pepper to taste (approx. ½ teaspoon each)

Place cut meat directly in the crockpot with marinade ingredients, stir and poke meat with fork to tenderize and season (15 minutes on warm setting while cutting other vegetables if in a hurry or marinate overnight in the refrigerator).

2 cups broth (or saved vegetable cooking water)
2-4 cups cabbage, collard greens and/or kale, chopped (or whole brussels sprouts)
5 carrots, sliced in ¾" chunks
3 stalks celery, ½" slices
1 large onion, diced or leek, sliced
6 oz (2 cups) mushrooms, quartered

Put all ingredients in crockpot. Mix thoroughly. Cover and cook on low 12-hours (high: 5-6 hours). Serve with a salad or almond biscuits and rose hips jam (see below).

For more information about the Siletz Tribe, please visit ctsi.nsn.us.

Rose hips jam and almond biscuits

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RD, LD, Siletz Tribal Head Start Nutritionist

As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. This segment focuses on rose hips jam and nut biscuits, also known as jam and bread without sugar or wheat.

Rose is one of the most important plant medicines in the Northwest. Various parts of the plant are used for physical as well as spiritual medicine.

In spring, the fragrance of the pink flowers fills the air. By late summer and fall, pollinated flowers transform into orange to bright red fruits called rose hips.

Rose hips are edible, but the hairy inner seeds are not eaten because they irritate the digestive system and are said to give people an "itchy bottom." Seeds can be removed by hand or you can use a jam mill to prepare jelly. I like removing the seeds by hand, but it takes time (a labor of love, as it should be).

A tea from rose hips is prepared for sore throats, colds, diarrhea and other conditions. Rose hips are high in vitamins C, B, E, K and A; and calcium, silica, iron, phosphorous and pectin.

Even though rose hips generally are harvested in the fall, jam can be made from dried rose hips through the year. If you use dried, you will need to use them deseeded. Even if you buy them deseeded, you will want to pick through them to assure that the seeds and sticks have been

removed as they feel like stones when you eat them.

I have used both dried and fresh. If you harvest them fresh, use them quickly because they need to be used, dried or frozen before they begin to mold.

Hazelnuts or filberts also are considered to be traditional food. Nuts can be used in baking rather than using white or wheat flour. Almonds also can be used in place of hazelnuts when they are more available as a nutritional equivalent.

For baking, nuts can be ground into a flour, or nut meal. I use a food processor to grind the flour, even though this isn't a traditional practice.

Resources

Renewing Salmon Nations Food Traditions, compiled and edited by Gary Paul Nabhan, published by Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT) Consortium in collaboration with Ecotrust, 2006

Feeding the People Feeding the Spirit – Revitalizing Northwest Coastal Indian Food Culture by Elise Krohn, Valerie Segrest and the Northwest Indian College, 2010

Wild Rose and Western Red Cedar – The Gifts of the Northwest Plants by Elise Krohn, printed with partial support from the Northwest Indian College and Longhouse Media, 2007

Preventing & Treating Diabetes Naturally The Native Way by Leslie E. Korn, Ph.D., MPH and Rudolph C. Ryser, Ph.D., 2009, DayKeeper Press, Olympia, Wash.

Wouldn't these recipes be a fun class project in school?

Rose Hips Jam

From Tracy Bosnian

Check to remove any seeds or sticks from your dried deseeded rose hips. Grind finely in a coffee grinder. Add apple cider or apple juice to the powder until it forms a jam consistency. If needed, add honey to taste. Place in a clean jar and refrigerate.

Use as a spread on fruit, such as apples, bread or almond biscuits. This jam will last only two weeks when refrigerated, but you can freeze it.

Rose hips combine well with apple cider for natural sweetness or also can be combined with cranberries when available. Both contain pectin and blend together well in a food processor or can be boiled 10 minutes with a small amount of water and honey for sweetness.

I've made this recipe with fresh rose hips and it is brighter in color but doesn't last as long. The flavor isn't the same as dried, but both are delicious.

This next recipe is selected to provide protein-rich, gluten-free, grain-free bread for a transition away from starchy bread toward a diet more nutritionally equivalent to the traditional diet. Hazelnuts can be used in place of the almonds and would, therefore, be more traditional (but this is not a traditional recipe).

Almond Biscuits

Yield: 16, 1.5" drop biscuits

2½ cups almond flour, plus about 1 cup for dusting the dough
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ cup butter or substitute such as coconut oil
2 eggs (or 6 tablespoons gelatin as a replacer)
1 tablespoon honey

In a medium bowl, combine almond flour, salt and baking soda.

In a large bowl, blend together butter or oil, eggs and honey.

Stir the dry ingredients into the wet until nice dough forms. Drop biscuits onto an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes, until biscuits are browned on the bottom edges. Release from the pan before cooling to prevent overbrowning. Serve with rose hips jam, gravy, honey or applesauce if desired.

Optional: If you are avoiding eggs, commercial unflavored gelatin can be used. Mix 1 tablespoon gelatin powder in 1 cup boiling water, use 3 tablespoons per whole egg.

Please note: I made this recipe using turkey stock (from boiled bones, which form a gel) and used the turkey fat for the oil, plus added fresh sage and thyme for a savory biscuit.