



## Nutrition

### Traditional Foods

In the past, the traditional diet of Aboriginal peoples consisted of foods that they could harvest and gather from the land and water around them, including fish, marine mammals, wild meat, and plants (BC Ministry of Health, 2002). Central to their culture and way of life, traditional foods were highly nutritious and sustained Aboriginal peoples successfully for generations (Doran, 2004).

In the post-contact era, traditional food use diminished as a result of relocation into settlements, decreased access to land, depletion of game, concern for environmental contaminants, food insecurity, less time and energy and fewer skills for harvesting, as well as costs of, or restriction on, hunting (Doran, 2004). Today, most Aboriginal people eat a mix of traditional and store-bought foods.

### Healthy Eating and Aboriginal Health Status

The shift from traditional foods to store-bought foods high in fat, sugar and starch has compromised the nutritional well-being of many Aboriginal peoples. Recent survey data indicates a significant proportion of First Nations adults are considered overweight (37%) or obese (30%), while one-third of First Nations children and youth are consid-

ered overweight (First Nations Centre, 2005).

Other nutrition related health problems include anemia, dental caries, heart disease and a rate of diabetes among Aboriginal adults that is three to five times higher than that of the general population (Willows, 2005).

### Benefits of Healthy Eating

Healthy eating plays a fundamental role in human health and development from the prenatal and early childhood years to adulthood and later life stages. It can reduce the risk of heart disease, some cancers, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, dental diseases, illness and infections (WHO, 2003). Healthy eating can also improve digestion, sleep, energy levels, self-image, concentration and performance at school or work.

### Healthy Eating Tips

*Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis* recommends enjoying a variety of foods daily from each food group (vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, meat and alternatives) (Health Canada, 2007). Traditional foods are excellent dietary choices. If you eat store-bought foods, it is important to choose foods low in fat, trans fat, salt and sugars. ...over





# fact sheet

## Resources

- ActNow BC  
www.actnowbc.gov.bc.ca
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program  
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE)  
www.cine.mcgill.ca
- Métis Cookbook and Guide to Healthy Living www.naho.ca
- Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis www.hc-sc/gc.ca
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon  
www.heartandstroke.bc.ca
- Honour Your Health Challenge  
www.honouringourhealth.ca
- National Aboriginal Diabetes Association www.nada.ca
- Nuxalk Food and Nutrition Handbook: A Practical Guide to Family Foods and Nutrition Using Native Foods.
- Nunavut Food Guide  
www.gov.nu.ca

lence for Early Childhood Development.

**First Nations Centre, NAHO (2005).** First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03. Ottawa, NAHO.

**Health Canada (2007).** Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations Inuit and Métis. Ottawa, Health Canada.

**Willows, Noreen (2005).** Determinants of Healthy Eating in Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: The Current State of Knowledge and Research Gaps. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96(3): S32-S36

**World Health Organization (2003).** Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. Report of a Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation. Geneva: WHO.



## References

**BC Ministry of Health (2002).** The Health and Well-being of Aboriginal People in British Columbia, 2001. Victoria: BC Ministry of Health, Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report.

**Doran, Lori (2004).** Voices from the Field: The First Nations and Inuit Perspective on Nutrition. Centre of Excel-



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Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

