



Can you taste the

LOVE?

Bringing Healthy Dishes to Gatherings Shows You Care

The problem with food is that it isn't just food. Imagine mashed potatoes. Or, for the Native people living around Tucson, imagine enchiladas. Now, think about tenderly mashing those potatoes. Think about enfolding goodies into the enchiladas. What does it feel like to do that? It feels good! You are putting love in those potatoes and enchiladas. Therein lies the problem. We all know that certain foods are "special." They are comfort foods. They settle us down, cheer us up. We take a bite, then another. We can feel the love.

Virginia Vasquez (Yaqui) has an enchilada story. Her grown son comes home for a visit. Virginia, who has been learning about heart-healthy meals, immediately gets busy. Two hours later, she is setting a plate of enchiladas on the table. Her son says, "Mom, I haven't had these in a long time!"

Virginia knows enchiladas have a lot of fat. But she is happy to make her son happy.

What's a mom to do?

We want to give our children, our partners, our community members, something they will gobble up. When **Josephine Ramon (Tohono O'odham)** goes to gatherings, she often brings food she thinks everyone will really like. "I think about what they will like, instead of what is good for them."

Then Josephine remembers a gathering when someone brought a salad garnished with cholla (cactus) buds. These used to be common food. They made the salad special. "It was just a regular green salad with cholla buds," says Josephine. She loved it.

The cholla buds are proof. You can put love in the food, have people really enjoy the dish, and have it be good for them. Says **Debra Gunter-Lockhart (Eastern Cherokee/Hopi)**, "When I go to a gathering and see healthy food, I feel great





“At one gathering, someone made a macaroni salad without any mayonnaise. It just had macaroni and chopped vegetables. It was good.”
Josephine Ramon
(Tohono O’odham)

because someone was thinking about me.”

Sara Garcia (Tohono O’odham) agrees. “I’m not supposed to have salt. So when there are dishes that don’t have salt, I’m glad.” Sara says she likes it when the food is unsalted, and those who want added salt use a salt shaker.


It’s a conflict. We are still making not-so-healthy-foods and bringing them to gatherings. Yet, if healthy foods are available, we choose those

and are thankful. Virginia, Josephine, Debra and Sara started thinking about some healthy foods that they would enjoy eating at gatherings. First the list was short: a lower-fat corn dish. Something with prickly pear in it. But, the more they thought about it, the longer the list grew. All agreed,

chopped vegetables. It was good.”

Debra remembered a gathering where there were many low-fat, low-sugar, and low-salt dishes grouped together. Others mentioned seeing labels saying “no sugar” or “no salt.” They appreciated these labels.

If there was one dish at a gathering that Sara would choose, it would be Indian spinach. “You have to gather it in the fields,” she says.

So before you attend the next gathering, consider this: There is love in a cholla bud. There is love in a bowl of wild spinach, mixed with onion, tomatoes, and beans. And, there is love in bringing a healthy dish to a gathering, for all to share. 



“I’m not supposed to have salt. So when there are dishes that don’t have salt, I’m glad.”
Sara Garcia
(Tohono O’odham)

that, instead of fried chicken and macaroni and cheese, they would gladly choose roasted chicken, green salad, fresh fruit, beans without lard, sugar-free Jell-O, grilled fish, grilled veggies, squash soup, and any Native, traditional food.

The list sparked Josephine’s memory. “At one gathering, someone made a macaroni salad without any mayonnaise. It just had macaroni and



“When I go to a gathering and see healthy food, I feel great because someone was thinking about me.”
Debra Gunter-Lockhart
(Eastern Cherokee/Hopi)





For Your Next Gathering



INSTEAD OF THIS:	BRING THIS:
Beef stew	<i>Venison stew</i>
Fried chicken	<i>Baked chicken with rosemary and sage seasoning</i>
Ground beef chili	<i>Vegetarian chili with zucchini and carrots</i>
Mashed potatoes	<i>Mashed yams sprinkled with chopped pecans</i>
Macaroni and cheese	<i>Beans without lard sprinkled with a little cheese</i>
Fry bread	<i>Hand-made whole wheat tortillas</i>
Cake	<i>Sliced fresh fruit with berries</i>
Pop	<i>Indian tea</i>

Angie Farnsworth (Diné/ British) made a low-salt soup for a gathering. “The squash came from my cousin’s garden. The beans are Colorado River beans. The corn is Hopi white corn.”



Produced by IHS Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, 3/2012