



Food, The Culinary Security Blanket

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in part in tastebud magazine, Jan. 2008

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Each of us has our own mental catalog of what foods bring us a sense of comfort and security, a temporary escape from a fast-paced and often uncertain world. For some, it's hearty beef and vegetable stew or macaroni and cheese or black-eyed beans and collard greens. For others, it's pizza or homemade biscuits and gravy or barbeque. Whatever your choice of gastronomic shelter, there are varying motives for reaching for these dishes that calm, soothe, and reassure us.

Succor Punch

According to the Random House Dictionary, succor is defined as: 1. help; relief; aid; assistance. 2. a person or thing that gives help, relief, aid, etc. Partaking in a nourishing and comforting meal always offers succor, but for some, this respite is found not only in hearty cooking, but also in desserts and snack foods.

Studies have shown that there are some pretty distinct differentiations between the genders when it comes to seeking psychological reprieve from food. For the most part, men tend to crave dishes from their childhood, meals that mom used to prepare. Yet, although these dishes can be simple and uncomplicated, such as pasta or stew, some women associate these foods with toiling away in the kitchen. According to Brian Wansink Ph.D. and author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*, "Because adult females are not generally accustomed to having hot food prepared for them and as children saw the female as the primary food preparer, they tend to gain psychological comfort from less labor-intensive foods such as chocolate, candy and ice cream."

Food Really is a Blanket

Although foods that console can be yearned for year-round, they are especially comforting when old man winter has caused the ground to freeze and has put a layer of frost on our windshields. There is a reason that we crave the heartier hotdishes and casseroles when the temperatures drop. These foods are insulating.

According to Marc David, visionary health and nutrition consultant and author of *The Slow Down Diet* and *Nourishing Wisdom*, "Researchers have discovered that body weight is generally greatest when the mean January temperature is lowest. This extra body fat is an evolutionary adaptation to insulate us from the cold and provide an emergency source of caloric energy." So please don't beat yourself up if the scale creeps up during the cold months. This is nature's way of comforting you. Take heart knowing that she will also provide cleansing and fat-clearing foods come spring.

HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



Food and Mood

The Food and Brand Lab at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, of which Mr. Wansink lead, conducted a survey in 2003 and found that, surprising to many, comfort foods are not consumed only when downhearted. "The opposite is often true," Wansink said. "People are more apt to seek out comfort foods when they're jubilant or when they want to celebrate or reward themselves." Similarly, comfort foods are often very healthy. And for those that aren't, there are always modifications you can make to prepare them more nutritiously.

Whether your choice of comfort foods is based on the season, the occasion, your personal history, or your identity, there is always an emotional component to what we eat, as emotions play a significant role in what we crave. No matter the reason, there is certainly room in a healthy diet to moderately partake in whatever your heart and mind desire.

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