

FOOD IN OLD HAWAI'I

THEN

The Hawaiian word for health is *ola*. It also means life. Thus, the word health and life was one and the same. Hawaiians obviously believed you could not have health without life, nor life without health. *Ka po'e kāhiko* (the old people of Hawai'i) regarded the body, mind and spirit as one. Each affected the condition of the other. If you abuse your body, you abuse your spirit and mind, and so on. Being healthy meant being physically, mentally and spiritually in *lōkahi* or harmony, according to noted Hawaiian scholar, Dr. George Kanahale, Po'okela Hawaiian Culture Course.

Traditional Lū'au Traditional Imu

Ancient Hawaiians were strong, sturdy and capable of bearing great fatigue. They were



farmers, fishermen, hunters, and gatherers who enjoyed a diversity of foods. For example, they planted and irrigated taro patches; cultivated crops such as yams, arrowroot, or breadfruit; hunted birds and pigs; gathered vines, ferns, herbs and medicinal plants from the forests; practiced both net and deep sea fishing; harvested shrimp, picked seaweed, and collected shellfish. Their main sources of protein were fish, squid, limpet, crab and other seafood, chicken, and birds. The main leafy vegetables were taro tops (*lū'au*), and edible plants such as tree fern and fan palm. Seasonings came from *kukui* nut, seaweed, *ho'io* fern and salt. They preserved food with salt and most foods were eaten fresh.

Poi, made from pounded taro root (one of the most nutritious carbohydrates known) is the staple starch food of the Hawaiians. *Poi* had great significance in the Hawaiian culture, as it represents *Hāloa*, the ancestor of chiefs and *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiians). There was a great reverence for the presence of poi at the table. It was unforgivable to have a quarrel, argue or haggle when *poi* was on the table. Pleasant conversation and heartiness was promoted.

According to Dr. Claire K. Hughes, PH, RD, Hawai'i Dept. of Health, if it was determined that the *maka'ainānā* (commoners) were becoming stout and clumsy, an advisor would urge the king to have the men enter into foot races and other vigorous activities to burn off the accumulating body fat. We are told that to attract chiefs and commoners for his

armies, Kamehameha the Great furnished their calabashes with vegetable food and fish to make the men sturdy and ready for instruction in the martial arts.

The ancient Hawaiians were fit. The traditional Hawaiian diet may have been "one of the best in the world". It was a simple, high starch, high fiber, low saturated fat, low sodium and low cholesterol diet. It had 12 percent protein, 18 percent fat and 70 percent carbohydrates. By comparison, the typical American diet today has 15 percent protein, 40 percent fat and 45 percent carbohydrates states Dr. George Kanahale.

NOW

Most modern Hawaiians do not follow a traditional lifestyle and, as a consequence, do not live a long time. Health data for the last 15 years show Hawaiian obesity has increased from 37 percent to 50.1 percent. Among Hawaii's racial groups, Hawaiians have the highest rates of heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, accidents and suicides. Efforts are underway to reverse this trend.

LŪ'AU (TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN FEAST)

The *lū'au* is a Hawaiian tradition - a feast to celebrate accomplishments, honor important people and commemorate great events. Ancient *lū'au* sometimes lasted for days. Much has changed since the days of ancient *lū'au*. Women and men are now allowed to eat together, which was forbidden in Hawai'i before the culture's system of *kapu* was eliminated in 1819. Women are also allowed to eat foods that were once denied them, such as bananas, coconuts, pork, turtle and several types of fish. The central feature of the *lū'au* is the *imu*, an underground oven (a shallow pit lined with stones). A whole pig is wrapped in *ti* and banana leaves and placed in the pit's hot center. The pig and *lāulau* are covered with multiple layers of banana, *ti*, or sometimes ginger leaves, and a final coating of earth. In about four hours the coverings are removed and the *lū'au* begins. Every *lū'au* has *poi*, the traditional starch.

Under King Kamehameha III, there was an 1847 event that was unforgettable, a *lū'au* with 10,000 in attendance, although in true Hawaiian style, food was prepared for 12,000. The guests were served: "271 hogs, 482 large calabashes of *poi*, 602 chickens, three whole oxen, two barrels of salt port, two barrels of biscuits, 12 barrels of *lāulau* and cabbages, four barrels of onions, 80 bunches of bananas, 55 pineapples, 2,245 coconuts, 4,000 heads of taro, 180 squid, oranges, limes, grapes and various fruit." Source: Manu Boyd, Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Now that was a *lū'au*!