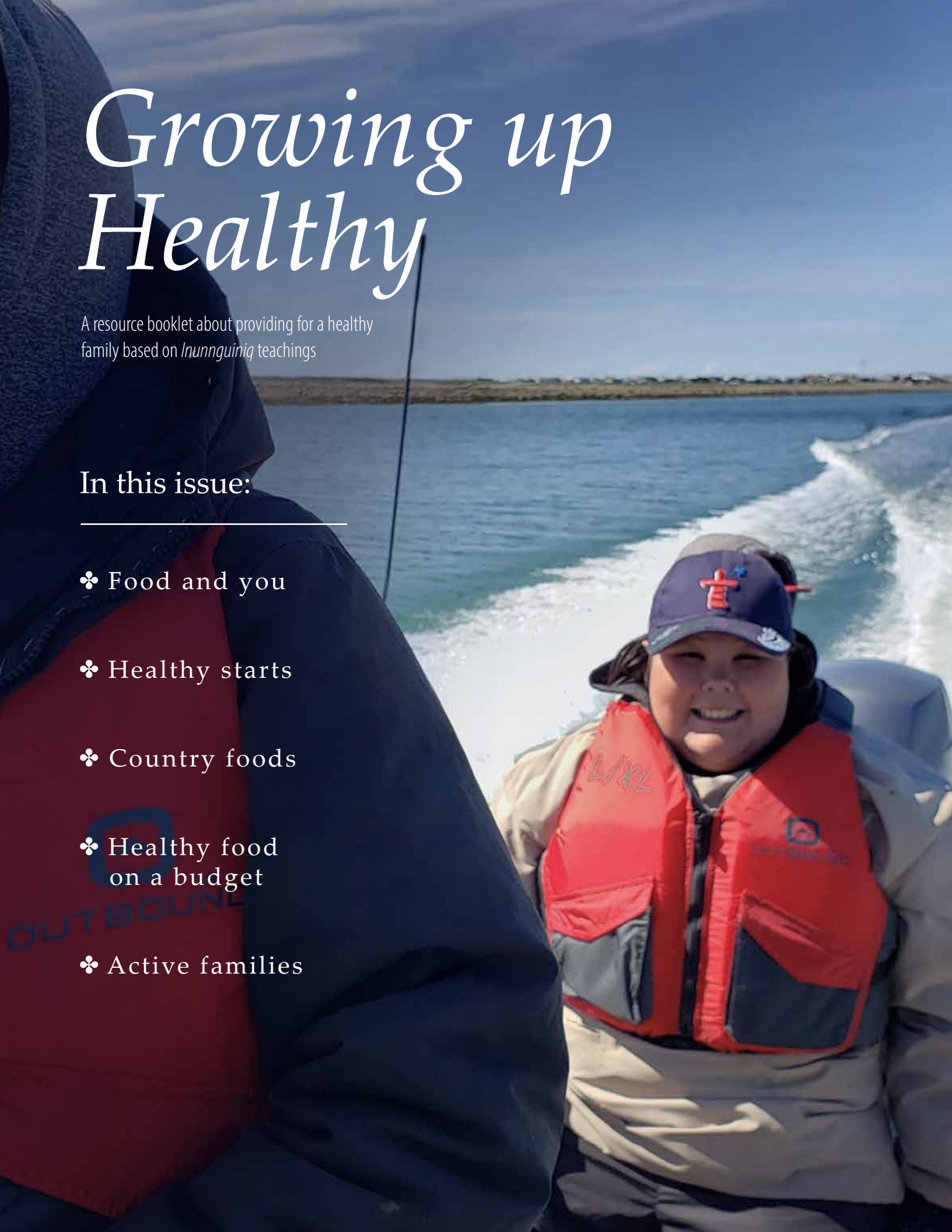
# *Growing up Healthy*

A resource booklet about providing for a healthy family based on *Inunnguiniq* teachings



## In this issue:

- Food and you
- Healthy starts
- Country foods
- Healthy food on a budget
- Active families

*Inuit have a unique way of thinking. There are people who grew up in strong families and those of us who were orphaned. We look for anyone who is willing to accept and share with us. How Inuit looked after each other and practiced caring for each other led to contentment. Individually we cannot stand on our own. It has always been an Inuit expectation that we help each other. The Inuit way of collective action/shared belief is how it can be done to bring harmony. We have been made as individual people, but we have been born into families for a reason. We need to begin healing with the families and bring back the strengths of Inuit society. If we initiate change, it will be effective. We need to talk to our children and young people in order to have a positive effect.*

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This publication is available for download at: nccih.ca.

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# How was this resource developed?

This series of resources is designed to help parents and families find strength in these roles according to Inuit teachings outlined in *inunnguiniq* – making capable human beings. To find other resources in this series, see the back cover.

Many people contributed to the content of this resource, primarily Elders. They shared their stories and experiences as well as the teachings and practices of ancestors that ground this information in *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*. The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (nccih.ca) and the Aqqiumavvik Society (aqqiumavvik.com) would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this resource, especially the Elders who live on through their wise words.

**Elders:**

- Rhoda Karetak
- Atuat Akittirq
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- Miriam Aglukark
- Mark Kalluak
- Peter Paniaq
- Qinuayuaq Pudlat
- Donald Uluadluak

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First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health
Centre de collaboration nationale de la santé autochtone

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QAUJIGIARTIIT

MWM
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The Early Years
A Martin Family Initiative

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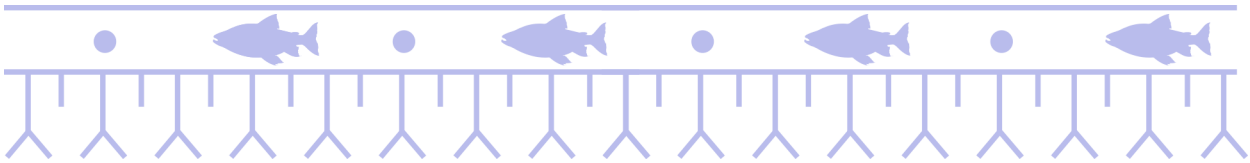


# Introduction

Inuit were totally reliant on what they could harvest from the land and waters. This reliance created a strong sense of respect for the food that sustained them.

- Food was respectfully harvested.
- Food was never taken for granted.
- Food was never wasted.
- All parts of the animal were used.
- Food was shared and enjoyed through eating together.
- Every source of food was used.

This reliance on what was provided by the immediate environment led Inuit to become very creative in the ways they preserved, prepared and stored food. As well, every part of the animal also supplied what was needed for making tools, hunting weapons, household implements, and for meeting technological needs of the people.

*Inuit used to be so strict and had to follow so many rules and laws regarding the environment to ensure that people of the future could enjoy the same privileges, clean water, and game to be available to feed themselves. We are the keepers of the environment, of the animals, of the water and the* sila *(natural world/atmosphere), and we occupy this land.*

**-Mark Kalluak.**

To meet these needs, Inuit actively harvested in every season and adjusted their activities and lifestyles accordingly to take full advantage of seasonal activities. Physical activity, strength and endurance, and positive well-being were required in order to live successfully.

In this booklet, we will look at how the knowledge and activities of Inuit in the past can set an example for healthy living today. We can also draw upon this in order to make the most of all the resources we have available to us to maintain balance in healthy living.

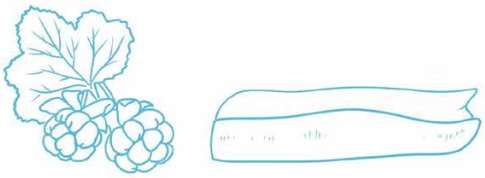
# Food and you

Inuit have undergone tremendous change in a very short period of time. Perhaps one of the most significant areas of change is in diet and the foods we are now eating. Another area is in the level of activity practiced in the past and the changes in the way we hunt, harvest, and spend time on the land and water. The way food was used, shared and respected has also changed. It is important to reflect on how you ate and shared food in the past and what that looks like in your life today. Consider what you would like your children to experience with regards to eating well.

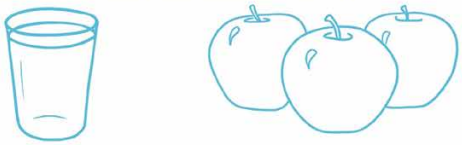
## *Inuit diet and metabolism*

Inuit diet was almost entirely proteins and animal fats. Inuit had some sugars from berries and also some complex carbohydrates that were in the animal parts they ate. This was an entirely healthy diet. Over thousands of years, the Inuit metabolism, or the way that Inuit digest food, was refined so that Inuit were able to use food very efficiently to allow them to live highly active, productive lives.

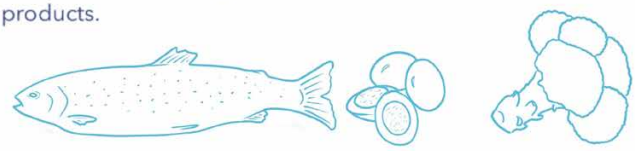
## STRONG FOODS - STRONG BODIES
## STRONG MINDS - STRONG SPIRITS



Strong foods are easy to recognize. They do not come in a box and have not been changed by someone. They are fresh from the land. All country foods are strong foods, but all vegetables and fruits are also strong foods that keep our bodies healthy.



Choose healthy snacks for your children from the strong food selection of nuts, vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses and other milk products.



Strong foods contain vitamins and minerals to help build strong bodies. These are often called the ABC foods. Kids need to get a good helping from all of the strong foods in order to eat strong, live long and pass it on!

Today Inuit have been introduced to many new foods that their bodies are not used to digesting. However, food insecurity can have a negative influence on our lives even when we no longer experience a shortage of food. The biggest change is in the amount of sugars and refined carbohydrates that are now the bulk of our diets. This change has caused increased rates of ill health for Inuit. Many types of cancers, heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, obesity, and tooth decay have increased amongst Inuit. We see this change of diet as being harmful to adult Inuit, but it is far worse for our children.

Many adult Inuit still eat healthy country foods. Unfortunately, we are seeing fewer children eating these foods. In fact, when we asked parents why they eat country food but don't feed it to their children, we were told that "only poor people eat country food and wealthy people eat store-bought foods." They did not want their children growing up thinking of themselves as poor. This dietary change is clearly an impact of colonization.

## *The role food plays in life*

Food is essential for life. It is also vital to the way we share and care for each other, our collective well-being, and our sense of belonging to a group. Food is central to every celebration and to all of our gatherings. It is part of the rites of passage when a child succeeds at getting and sharing a first catch. Inuit say that even by sharing a very small bit of food with someone, you bring a blessing and good health to their lives.

Your past experiences with food often affect how you interact with food today.

Consider the following:

- Did you regularly eat as a family?
- Did you have healthy foods to eat?
- Was food always available?
- Did you experience hunger at times?
- Did some people get to eat while others went short?

Your responses may be indications of why a person could overeat or use food to comfort or reward oneself in difficult times. Are you passing along these practices to your children? What could you do rather than use food as a reward or bribe or comfort or threat?

| | Rather than this … | Try this instead |
|---|---|---|
| Reward | If you just stop doing that, I'll give you ice cream when we get home. | I need you to stop that now. Think of something enjoyable you can be doing while you wait for me to finish this. |
| Comfort | Don't cry. I have a treat for you. | I'm sorry you were hurt. Let's cuddle with a book until you feel better. |
| Threat | Do your chores or you won't get any pop. | Everyone in the family has a job to do. When we each do our part, it shows how we love each other. |

## *Model good food habits*

- Provide healthy food in healthy portions.
- Eat together as a family.
- Share food with others.
- Offer snacks to kids that are good choices.

*I grew up when the only sweet we had was sugar for our tea. Country foods were what I was weaned on. The value and purpose of Inuit culture, which was given to us to help us survive and thrive as a people, still is true today. For us to just not use it – to just lose it – is to say that we do not respect those great people who struggled hard to make us exist today. It is like we traded our forefathers' ability and knowledge for another way of life. This may be fine in some respects, but we must be aware of what the impacts of adopting new ways will have on us.*

**-Atuat Akittirq**

# Healthy starts

- When mom is healthy through her pregnancy, baby has the best start in life. Healthy eating is important to a healthy pregnancy. With a strong food diet, mom will experience more energy, positive emotions and better self-image.
- Avoiding substances like drugs and alcohol during pregnancy gives baby the best chance at a healthy start.
- Keeping active will give mom better sleep, reduces stress, improves muscle tone, and helps build strength for a safe delivery.
- Drink lots of water to support good health. In the past, pregnant and lactating women were told to only drink from the small pools of water found on rocks during the spring. This water was distilled and safer than the running water in streams.

## *Elders share how to prepare for baby*

Young girls getting their first menstrual period had to tell their parents and an Elder, and if an elderly person gave the girl a rule, the young girl would have to try to follow this. When this happened, the fact that the girl was told to follow an order was not taken lightly. From adolescence, young people were told what to expect and how to behave when preparing for a child.

Everyone used to treat pregnancy with joyful expectation. The mothers used to know when their daughters were expecting. They had a way of feeling the expecting mother to find out if she was pregnant or not. When the women were expecting, they had to get out of the house as soon as they woke up, and they had to move the baby around so the placenta would not get stuck after the baby was born. They were also expected to have healthier babies by following these rules.

The first time a couple is expecting a baby, following the Inuit tradition, both parents have to go out of the dwelling when they wake up to smell the air outside. If they want a girl, the woman has to go out first; if they want a boy, the man was expected to go out first. It they want a boy, the woman should eat seaweed throughout her pregnancy.

As well, some babies became too big – the tummy of the expectant mother got too big, maybe because the mother was not exercising enough or was eating the wrong foods. The baby would not be allowed to grow too big when it was in its mother's tummy but would be well fed once it was born. A baby can gain weight very quickly if the mother consumes healthy foods and drinks a lot of broth to build up her breast milk.

The babies slept with their mothers all the time, carried on their mother's back. Without being taken out of the *amautik*, they were put in front inside the mother's amautik to nurse and then put back behind. A child could be carried and nursed this way for the first few years. Mother and child were closer, and the mother did not get pregnant again right away.

# Country foods

Country foods are available in every season. They are rich in proteins and nutrients. Most have no sugar, low salt content and few carbohydrates. They are the healthiest choice for Inuit. When we harvest these foods, we engage in respectful relationship with the land, waters and animals. Inuit are fortunate that nothing from the land is poisonous or harmful.

There are a few exceptions:

- Do not eat the liver of polar bears.
- Pregnant women should not eat dried meat (*nipku*) made form beluga or narwhal.

Inuit harvested together as families and shared food with others in order to celebrate what the land had to offer and to build relationships with others. Sharing food is widely practiced today and should continue.

*Country foods have many benefits both culturally and nutritionally.*

## BELUGA

***for a healthy heart and fighting infection***

***Vitamin A:*** *helps us see well in the dark and fight infection*

***Vitamin D:*** *is needed for building strong bones and preventing rickets*

***Omega-3 fatty acids:*** *helps the heart and blood vessels work properly*

***Vitamin E:*** *an antioxidant that prevents cell damage*

***Vitamin C:*** *an antioxidant that keeps gums, teeth and skin healthy. It also helps wounds heal and fight infection*

***Selenium:*** *an antioxidant that prevents cell damage*

*Text and concept from Nutrition Fact Sheet Series - Inuit Tradtional Foods from the Government of Nunavut*
*Graphic produced by the Aqqiumavvik Society, Arviat Nunavut*

## CARIBOU

***all parts of the caribou provide excellent nutrition***

***Iron:*** *keeps our blood healthy and energy high*

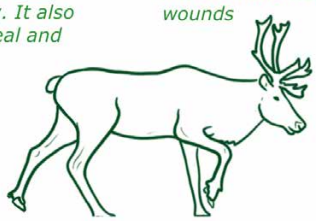
***Vitamin A:*** *helps us see well in the dark and fight infection*

***Vitamin C:*** *an antioxidant that keeps gums, teeth and skin healthy. It also helps wounds heal and fight infection*

***Selenium:*** *an antioxidant that prevents cell damage*

***Protein:*** *helps build and repair muscles, skin and blood*

***Zinc:*** *is needed for fighting infection and healing wounds*



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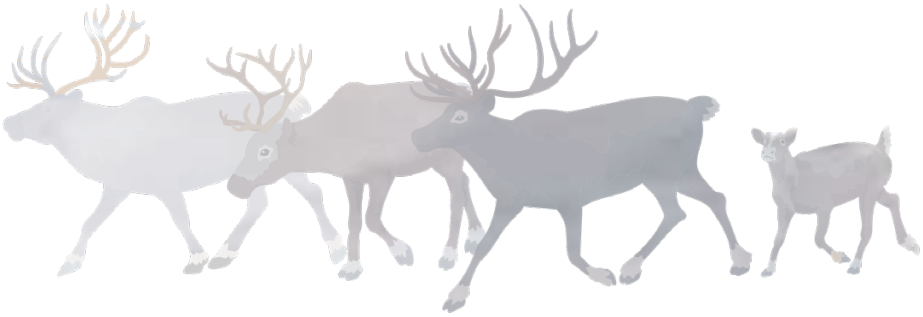

*Inuit love to eat aged seal or narwhal oil, dry meat, and* maktaaq. *Whatever we get attached to, it becomes a delicacy for us. If the birds are just arriving from the south, eggs are our delicacies. When the weather gets to a point where we can freeze our meat, we desire that type of meat. We would mix ptarmigan intestines with meat so that it could be eaten. Ptarmigan intestine is something we do not think of as useful, yet it was used for survival. A delicious treat is to mix berries and fish roe together as well. If we cannot afford expensive store-bought food, there is always delicious wild meat we can depend on. In every season there are strong foods available to Inuit. Our ancestors knew how to prepare these foods.*

**-Rhoda Karetak**

# Healthy food on a budget

*We see the heads and legs of animals discarded and wasted on the land, even though they make wonderful soups. We see a lot of heads, hooves and legs being left on the land, but when people are taught how to cook them, they are part of the most delicious pieces of meat. Every part of the animal is good to be eaten and it is disrespectful to waste so much.*

**-Donald Uluadluak**

## *Feeding baby*

Breastfeeding is the best possible option for you and your baby. Your baby doesn't need anything more than breast milk for the first 6 months of life, but will probably show an interest in trying new foods a little earlier. Continuing to breastfeed provides your child not just with good nutrition, but also with antibodies to prevent disease and illness. Formula is expensive and requires careful preparation. Much is wasted if baby does not use an entire feeding. There is a lot of helpful information available about breastfeeding.

If you have adopted or are unable to breastfeed, speak to your Health Centre to find out the recommended formula options for your child. Different brands come with different outcomes. Usually it is best to buy one kind and try it out to see how baby reacts to the formula. You may have to experiment a bit before you find the best fit. Follow the recommended procedures carefully. Pay attention to proper sterilization of bottles and equipment. Generally, you cannot reuse any formula that has not been consumed in one feeding. Using substitutes such as Carnation Milk or cow's milk will not provide your baby with the proper nutrients needed for strong development. You are better to feed your baby with animal broth made from seal or caribou bones rather than using a milk product.

*We cooked bones and the hooves of caribou – the bones and the marrow are so good when you mix it with meat; it makes a good broth. If we concentrate on the food preparation, this is something we can all be proud of. We still all have knowledge of how to prepare wild meat so that it is the most delicious piece of meat you ever ate.*

**-Mark Kalluak**

## *Using country foods*

Country foods are highly nutritious and have sustained Inuit for generations. Pregnant parents are healthier when they eat a diet rich in country food and babies will do well when they begin to eat by being introduced to country foods. Animal broth made from boiling bones is rich in bone marrow, calcium and fats helpful for good development. A first food for baby is often ground meat mixed with broth into a paste. Fish (strained of bones) chowders and pureed soups are also a good start. You do not need to salt these soups. Encourage baby to gnaw on large bones when teething. When caribou or muskoxen are not available, food suitable for babies and small children can be made from small game such as ptarmigan, rabbit, birds and fish. Cook until very tender and puree or grind to avoid any possibility of choking.

Harvesting food from the land in the summer/fall is useful now that we have the ability to freeze, dry and store foods like berries, teas, flowers, roots and other edibles. These can often be added to foods for flavour, made into sauces, and stewed to make broths and drinks. There is a lot of information now available about harvesting Arctic vegetation.

## *Growing foods*

Growing vegetables indoors has been successfully introduced in many northern communities. Increases in the growing season have allowed seeds to be started indoors in the spring as the longer days begin, then moved outside through the summer growing season, and back indoors until they are ready to be harvested. Some families have also taken up growing vegetables hydroponically and these systems can be used in small spaces. Even without growing your own vegetables, adding greens to your diet is very healthy. Most Inuit are not familiar with eating greens, but there are many resources that can assist with finding ways to incorporate vegetables with country foods in delicious recipes.

## *Preparing and preserving foods*

Fresh food is always the very best and the best for you. Inuit eat *quaq* (frozen meat) in many forms because it is quick, easy and very healthy. However, Inuit have intricate ways of preparing and preserving foods to provide variety and added nutritional value. There is a real science to caching meat to improve the taste, drying meats using beds of willows or lichen, making *igunaq* (fermenting meat) and today, pickling foods, making meat wraps and sausages using animal intestine, and smoking animal parts. These ways of preparing and preserving foods are being rediscovered by Inuit today.

As well, many Inuit are using canning methods to preserve seasonal fish/meats for safekeeping over long periods. Canning berries, making jams/sauces, and freezing foods harvested in season are all useful options for feeding your family well.

## *Using leftovers*

Wasting food was never acceptable to Inuit. It shows disrespect for the animal that gave itself to the hunter and to the person who was given the food by the hunter. There are so many ways that leftovers can be re-created into favourite family meals. Making good use of leftovers also helps you to stretch your food budget. Stews and soups are the most obvious way to use leftovers. Making a quick hash or shredding meat into a pulled meat on a bun option, using leftovers on a pizza, folding them into an omelette or frittata, making fried cakes or adding them into a noodle casserole are all very good options. Look for recipe ideas that will help you make good use of your leftovers.

## *Drinking*

The best beverage is water. Fortunately, most communities have a good supply of drinking water close at hand. Water does not contain sugars and empty calories; it will not cause tooth decay and it is free. Children do not need to have juice to drink. Inuit never had anything other than water or tea made from land plants. If you do give your child juice as a treat, they should have ¼- ¾ cups a day or (5-6 oz or 125-175 ml). Consider making it a once a week treat – an only Friday offering.

*Share the following story with your kids to teach them about water and its benefits…*

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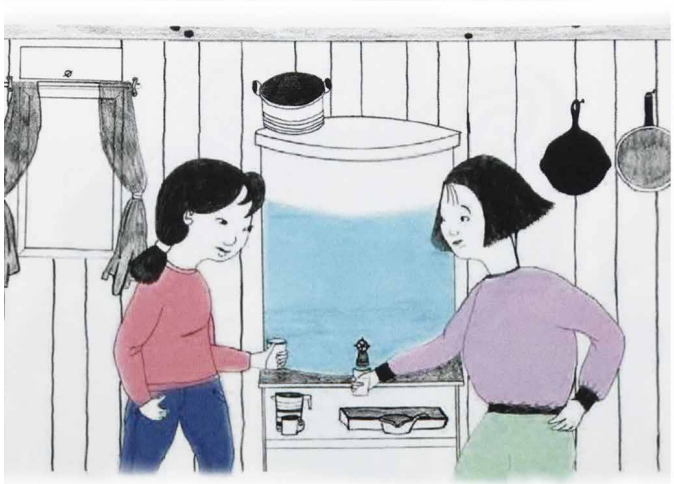
# Drink Strong



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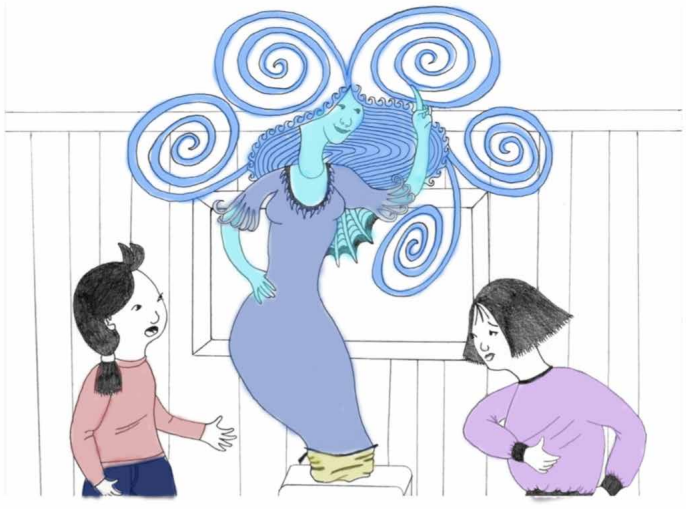
Juli: “Wow! This water is really clear.”
Quasa: “Yeah. And it really tastes great. Let’s make some juice.”

ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇ ᓯᕗᓪᓕᖅ: “ᐅᓇ ᓱᕐᓗ ᐊᐅᐸᓗᒃᑐᖅ ᓯᐅᕋᐅᔭᖅᑐᖅ.”
ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇ ᑭᖑᓪᓕᖅ: “ᑭᓯᐊᓂ ᒪᒪᓛᖑᒃᒪᑦ ᓂᕆᑉᓗᒍ.”

Juli:“It looks like red sugar.”
Quasa:“But it tastes really great.”

ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇᑦ ᐃᕆᐊᓪᓚᒃᐳᑦ: “ᑭᓇᐅᒐᕕᐟᓐ?”
ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐸᖅ: “ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᕐᐸᖑᐳᖕᒐ.
ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐳᖕᒐ ᓴᙱᓂᖅᐸᖑᑎᓪᓗᖕᒐ. ᑕᐃᒪᙱᓪᓕᒫᖅ ᓄᖅᔪᐃᑦᑐᔪᖕᒐ
ᐊᒻᒪ ᐊᓯᕐᓂᓗᑐᐃᓐᓇᙱᓗᖕᒐ. ᓴᐱᖅᓴᖅᑐᖅᙱᑦᑐᖅ ᐊᒻᒪ ᐊᔪᒐᐃᑦᑐᔪᖕᒐ.”

Kids: “Who are you?”
Water Woman: “I am Water Woman. I have a special strength.
I keep going and never have to quit. I have endurance.”



ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇ ᓯᕗᓪᓕᖅ: "ᓄᖅᑲᓇᐊᒥᐊᔪᒪᒪ ᐱᖃᐃᓕᓴᕐᕕᖕᒥ ᐊᖅᐸᓕᕋᓇᐊᖃᓕᕐᖓᐸᑕ. ᓇᑭᓪᓕ ᓴᙱᓕᕐᒥᒃ ᐱᑦᑕᖅᐱᓐ?"
ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇ ᑭᖑᓪᓕᖅ: "ᐊᒃᓱᓐ, ᓴᙱᓕᕐᒥᒃᑕᐅᖅ ᐱᒍᐊᕋᔭᕐᒥᔪᖕᒪᐸᑕᐅᖅ. ᑭᖑᓪᓕᖅᐹᖑᑦᑕᕋᔭᙱᑦᑐᖕᒪ ᐊᒻᒪ ᕿᒪᒃᑕᐅᑦᑕᖕᒋᓪᓗᖕᒪ ᒪᓕᒃᑳᖕᒪᐸᑭᑦ ᓄᑕᖃᑦ ᐅᑭᐅᕐᑯᖅᑐᓂᖅᓴᓂᑦ"
ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐹᖅ: "ᑕᐃᒻᓇ ᖃᐅᔨᒍᐊᒃᑲᓐ ᖃᓄᖅ ᐱᕙᓪᓕᕈᑎᖃᕐᒪᖔᕐᒪ ᖃᐅᔨᒪᔭᐅᙱᑦᑐᖅ ᐃᒥᑦᓯᐊᕙᖕᒥᑦ ᐃᒥᖅᑕᕋᒪ."

Juli: "I quit when we have to run in the gym.
Where do you get your special strength?"
Quasa: "Yeah, I want special strength too.
Then I wouldn't get left behind when the big kids go places."
Water Woman: "The secret is in what I drink."

ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐹᖅ: "ᐱᒋᐊᕐᓂᖕᒐᓂᑦ, ᐃᒥᔪᐃᑦᑐᕗᖕᒐ ᓯᐅᕋᐅᔭᖅᑐᖃᓗᐊᖅᑐᓂᒃ ᐃᒥᒐᒃᓴᕐᓂᒃ. ᐸᑎᒍᖅ ᑏᑦ ᐃᒥᒐᒃᓴᐅᑉ ᐃᓗᐊᓄᑦ ᒥᓯᒍᒃ. ᖃᓄᐃᑦᑐᔭᖅᐸ ᐃᒃᐱᖕᓂᖕᒐ?"
ᓄᑕᕋᓐᓇᑦ: "ᓂᖅᑲᑖᑯᓂ"
ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐹᖅ: "ᑕᐃᒻᓇ ᓯᐅᕋᐅᔭᖅᑐᐊᓗᖕᒧᑦ ᐱᕗᖅ. ᓯᐅᕋᐅᔭᖅᑐᖅᓂᐱᖅᑲᑖᕈᑕᐅᓪᓕᖅᑕᖅᐳᖅ ᑎᒥᖕᓄᑦ. ᓄᖃᐃᔪᑎᖃᓕᖅᑕᑐᖅ ᓈᑭᑦᑐᐊᓘᓕᖅᓗᓂ ᐊᒻᒪ ᑕᖃᓴᕋᐃᓕᖅᓗᓂᓗ"

Water Woman: "For a start, I don't drink sugar drinks. Dip your finger in the glass. How does it feel?"
Kids: "Sticky"

ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐸᖅ: "ᖃᐅᔨᒪᓚᐅᖅᐱᓐ ᑎᒥᑦ ᐃᒪᕐᒥ ᑕᒪᒃᑮᒃᓴᒃᓗᓂ ᓴᓇᔭ ᐅᓯᒪᖕᒪᑦ. ᐃᒪᕐᒥᑦ ᑎᒥᑦ ᐃᒥᖅᑎᓐᓇᖅᑕᕈᖕᓂ ᐱᕙᓪᓕᕈᑎᑦᓯᐊᒥᐊᖕᒍᖕᒪᑦ ᖃᐅᔨᒪᓂᐊᖅᐳᑎᑦ ᐊᓐᓂᐅᒪᑦᓯᐊᕐᓂᕐᒪᑦ."

Water Woman: "Did you know that most of your body is made of water?
Make water what you drink to keep your body working well."

ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐸᖅ: "ᐃᒪᖅ ᒪᐃ ᓱᕈᖅᓯᒪᓂᖅᙱᓪᓚᑦᑖᖅᑐᖅ. ᐃᒪᖅ ᓄᑖᒃᑲᓇᒃ. ᐃᒪᖅ ᐊᑭᖃᙱᑦᑐᖅ ᐊᒻᒪ ᑎᒥᖕᓄᑦ ᐊᑐᑎᖃᓪᓚᓇᒃᐳᖅ"

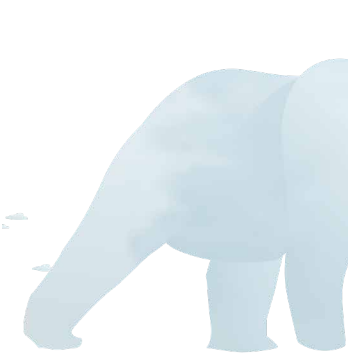
Water Woman:"Water is pure. Water is fresh.
Water is free and it is what your body needs."

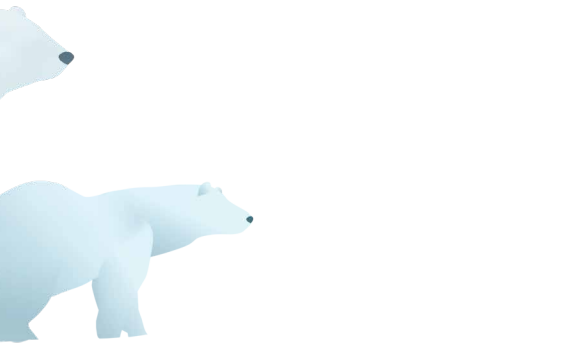
ᐊᕐᓇᖅ ᐊᔪᙱᓐᓂᖅᐹᖅ: “ᐅᓚᐸᑐᑦ ᓇᑭᖅᑎᒋᒍᐊᕐᓂᕈᕕᑦ, ᐃᒥᑦᓯᐊᖅᑕᕐᓗᑎᑦ ᐃᒪᑦᓯᐊᕙᓗᙱᑦ. ᓴᙱᓂᕐᓄᑦ ᐃᒥᑦᓯᐊᖅᑕᕐᓂᐊᖅᐳᑎᑦ!”

Water Woman: “If you want to be fast and not tire like me, drink lots of clear good water. Drink Strong!”

ᓴᙱᓂᕐᓄᑦ ᐃᒥᑦᓯᐊᖅᑕᕐᓂᐊᖅᐳᑎᑦ. ᐃᓄᓯᕐᒥᒃ ᑕᑭᔪᕐᒥᒃ ᓂᕈᐊᓕᕐᓗᑎᑦ ᐊᒻᒪ ᑭᖑᓚᕙᓂᐊᖅᑕᕐᓄᑦ ᑐᕋᖅᑎᑦᓯᐊᕋᓯᐊᕐᓂᐊᖅᐸᐃᑦ.

Drink Strong! Live long and pass it on.





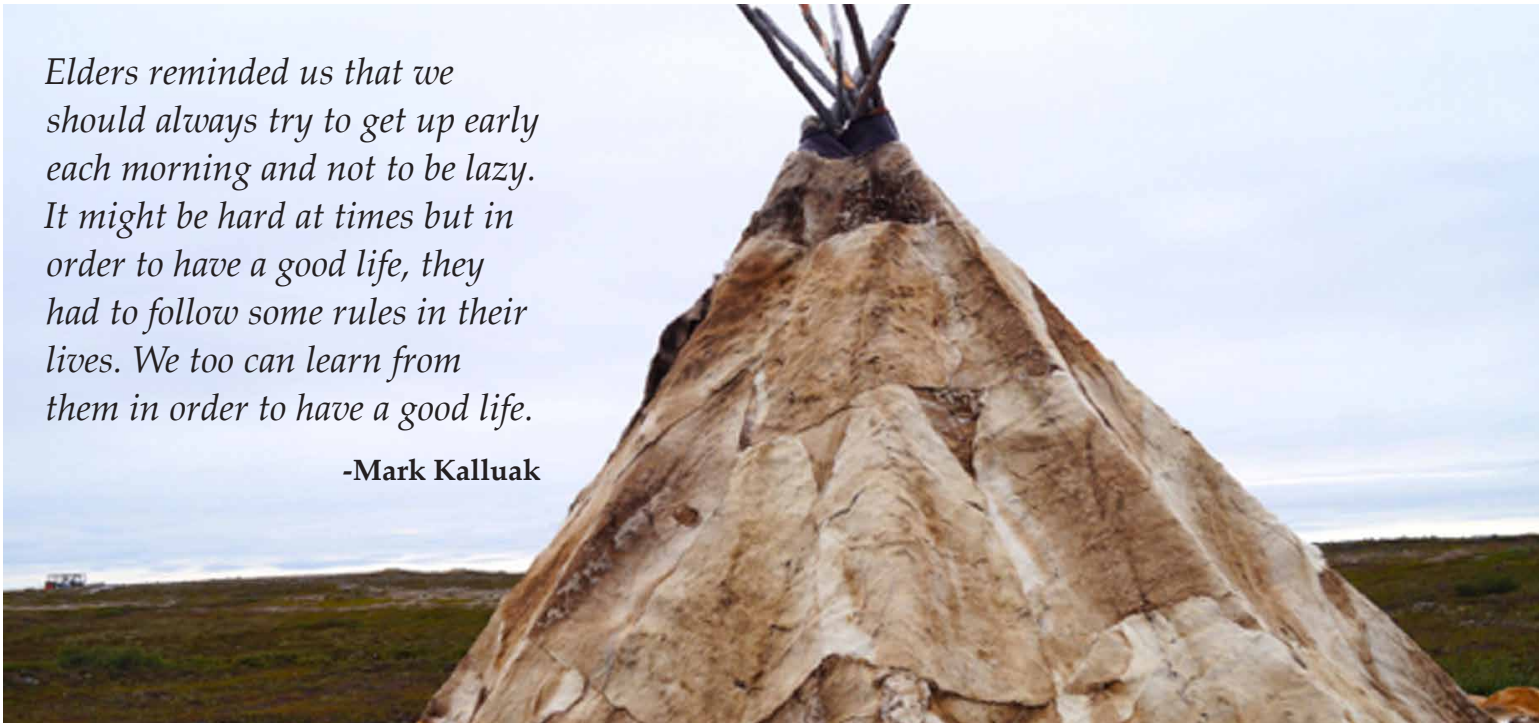
# Active families

Inuit led a very demanding lifestyle. In order to survive, they had to be continually busy, planning and preparing in every way in order to be successful. Elders tell us that every game and activity had three components to it – they were designed to develop specific physical skills, to build thinking strategies, and to nurture a spirit of cooperation and team building. Becoming skilled was a goal for every person. Inuit also identified that in terms of physical ability, each person needed to develop in the areas of endurance, flexibility, accuracy and strength. These expectations meant that children were encouraged to participate in many different activities in order to build these abilities.

Everyone has the ability to be active in everyday life. This can include making choices such as riding a bike or walking rather than driving a vehicle, spending time on the land regularly to connect with your natural world, dancing while doing the housework or in-home walking programs during the winter months. It is important to model an active lifestyle for your children. You will always be their first teachers and what you do, rather than what you say, will have a lasting effect on them. Take time for regular family activities that you can all participate in such as sliding on a Sunday afternoon, family walks after dinner, setting nets together, or picking berries on the land.

*One of the biggest problems we have today is children and young people not doing anything at all, or not willing to do anything. They are not learning these things by playing. They would not be doing anything and usually looked bored all the time. The ones who were reminded to keep busy with their hands are the ones [who] always look for something useful to do. The ones who never take time to play and learn would often grow to be lazy adults.*

**-Joe Karetak**



*Elders reminded us that we should always try to get up early each morning and not to be lazy. It might be hard at times but in order to have a good life, they had to follow some rules in their lives. We too can learn from them in order to have a good life.*

**-Mark Kalluak**

# What you can do

## *Healthy eating*

Good nutrition is very important to a good life. Inuit always ate whatever the land provided. Country food is best. Children should be encouraged to eat it and eat every variety available. Teach your child from an early age to try different types of country food and to develop a taste for it. Store-bought food is not generally as nutritious. Poor eating habits contribute to hearing loss, learning problems, tooth decay, seeing problems, and sickness in children. Start early, provide a variety of foods, model good eating habits, and make strong foods available in your home.

Toddlers have small stomachs, so small portions are a good idea. Inuit usually allow a child to self-regulate what to eat, but the parents regulate what is offered. Inuit also ate as needed throughout the day.

## *Healthy eyes*

In the first year, your baby will have well-developed sight. Observing everything that is going on is how children learn. Inuit put enormous emphasis on encouraging good observation skills. Creating opportunities for your child to observe closely and "see" connections is critical to developing deep thinking. Good eye health is supported by healthy eating. Fish and dark green and orange vegetables support healthy eyes. Generally, a child can have an eye check-up after 3 years of age if there is concern about their sight. A pre-school screening takes place for every child before the start of kindergarten.

## *Healthy ears*

Babies who are breast fed by their mothers have healthier teeth and fewer problems with their ears. They also have much healthier and fewer behavioural problems later than the ones who are bottled fed. Since a baby says what they hear, good hearing supports strong language development. Many Inuit children suffer from early hearing loss linked to an ear infection called otitis media. Otitis media is a middle ear infection linked to smoking during pregnancy and afterwards. Prevention involves careful clearing of the nasal passages so that the infection cannot take hold. If you suspect hearing loss, early testing should take place. There may be ways to prevent further damage. However, all children will be tested during their pre-school screening.

*Hands are trained to do something like sew and one doesn't think too much about it and the eyes help by guiding, but the heart knows why activity is needed, who it will help and the care to be taken to please and serve others. If a person only watches and doesn't practice (with their hands), they never learn properly. If a person doesn't apply the ability and do something out of their heart for others, there is no motivation for good work or contribution. For example, an older person without much physical ability can still set up a tent properly in a way that the wind will not destroy it because they have skill and a willingness to still contribute to the wellbeing of others.*

**-Rhoda Karetak**

## *Healthy teeth*

Tooth health was not an issue for Inuit in the past since they did not consume sugars in their diet. Today, it is a huge problem for Inuit children. Healthy eating will build strong teeth and bones. Consume calcium-rich foods while pregnant and breastfeeding. Once your child's teeth come in, practice cleaning the teeth with a soft cloth. This helps to establish a good habit your child will follow through life. If the teeth are touching, floss between teeth to remove any food and support gum health. Avoid giving your child a drink using a bottle if at all possible. Never use sugary drinks/ juices in a bottle. Use a sippy cup for small amounts of watered-down juice if you give this. Wipe your child's teeth after juice or any sweets. The best practice is to provide water for your child instead.

When your child is able (3-4 years), teach them to brush their teeth. Make this a regular morning and evening practice, brushing front and back of all teeth and spitting rather than swallowing after brushing. Floss the teeth after meals. At about 1 year of age, a child can see a dental hygienist or dentist.

## *Sleeping*

Inuit were always told that to be in balance, one must spend equal times in rest and activity. When life is out of balance in any aspect, you will not be able to live in harmony. Getting sufficient rest enables your body to be prepared for unexpected challenges. It also helps your body to repair and prepare itself for growth and change.

Babies are going through very rapid growth and change and so will sleep more often (about 2-4 hours at a time). New moms should sleep when the baby sleeps or at the same time that the baby sleeps so that they have the energy to meet their baby's needs throughout the day and night. Have your baby sleep on their back and don't have any soft items such as pillows or toys nearby. As baby grows, sleep patterns will change. A toddler needs about 10-13 hours of sleep and an afternoon nap. It's helpful to establish a routine that will help your child relax into sleep. Having a quiet time reading or listening to music, or being cuddled or carried in the amautik often helps.

## *Being active*

Children need to be busy, eat well, exercise and be outside a lot. In this way, they will be strong, prepared and fit for the future. Following an active lifestyle is not something that should be left to chance. One of the underlying principles of *inunnguiniq* is to develop good habits for life. Physical activity is a good habit that must be instilled early and promoted throughout every life stage.

Parents can:

- Exercise with your baby. Actively play together.
- Carry your baby in the *amautik* so they can experience your own activity.
- Find time to do new things together, teach skills through games, spend time outside.
- Find ways to keep moving with your child.
- Don't let your toddler sit still for more than 1 hour at a time.
- Build coordination and skills through activities to challenge big and small muscles.

*I had three adults who helped me to become a human being. When I was growing up, they would fight with me on the floor to test my strength.*

**-Jose Angutinngurniq**

## *Keeping safe*

Everyone has a responsibility to keep children safe. Children should always be closely monitored and anything that might cause harm should be removed from their reach.

Safety tips:

- Always put baby in a safe place and do not leave baby unmonitored, especially in a tub.
- Watch your child when animals are around. Teach the child how to interact with a pet or dogs in the community.
- Don't allow a child to have anything that might cause choking if swallowed. Remember children test things by putting them into the mouth.
- Store all household chemicals, medicines and sharp/ unsafe objects safely away.
- Don't let electric cords dangle; cover electric outlets.
- Teach your child when something is dangerous. Use a word like "*jaii*" to indicate something is not safe or too hot.
- Regularly clean/disinfect toys and surfaces that your child touches.
- Watch for allergic reactions or food intolerances as your child comes in contact with new things.

Inuit had very few allergic reactions to things in their environment. Today, this is far more common as so many new materials, chemicals and substances have become part of the environment. An allergic reaction can happen very quickly and must be treated quickly. It usually takes the form of rashes, itchy / watering eyes, runny nose or tightening of the throat. A food intolerance may result in cramps, rash, diarrhea or a runny nose. If you notice your child has these signs, talk to your doctor or community nurse.

## *Health check-ups*

Following a regular check-up schedule with your child is an important way to keep your child healthy. A baby should be seen at 1 week, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 12 months. If you do not receive an appointment from your health centre, call to say you'd like your child to have a check-up. It is also important to keep up with the immunization schedule. Ask the nurse to provide you with a list of the immunizations your child needs and keep track of this at home so that you will know what has been administered and when additional shots are required.

*Children go to school without breakfast so their productivity will not be very high; they are drained from not sleeping properly and not eating. In the old days, we were more of a group and we looked after each other more. We looked after the well-being of our children and looked after their future.*

**-Rhoda Karetak**

It is good to keep a child thermometer at home so that you can monitor any fevers and get medical help when needed. Also have equipment to clear your child's nasal passages. Inuit children are very susceptible to lung infections and these are passed around our communities very quickly. Be aware of these signs of a lung infection:

- Cough that produces mucus (*nuvak*)
- Cough pain
- Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Fever

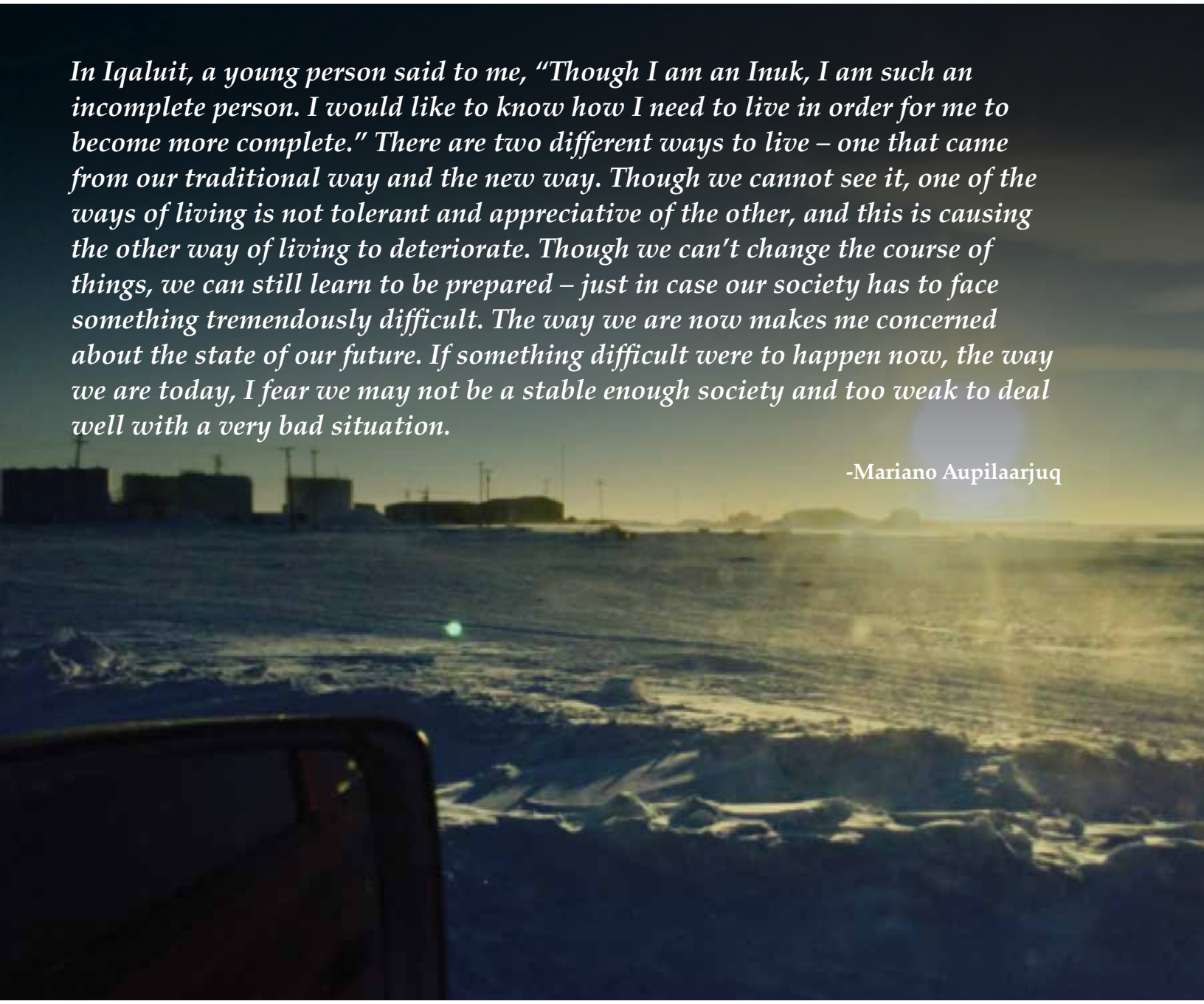
## *Healthy hearts and spirits*

Inuit paid careful attention to maintaining a state of harmony through respectful relationships with our natural and spiritual worlds and with other people. Harmony requires living a balanced life. When we are out of balance, we threaten the harmony of everyone around us. Living in balance was dependent on the proper attitude with which we approached life. Even in the most difficult or threatening situations, a person must remain calm and use a positive attitude to seek good solutions. These attitudes were taught through *inunnguiniq* and were built into the hearts of children to prepare them for a hard life. Elder Mary Muckpa said, "Today everything is so much easier, but we are lacking something – direction and harmony within families." Family is the central building block of Inuit culture, and so supporting healthy family life is essential to cultural well-being.

*Animals gave themselves up to feed us. We were very respectful for this reason. We gave thanks to the animal and were careful to use the meat respectfully. All animals have a soul/tarniq and when we eat the animal, we are taking in the energy and spirit of the animal. When we are talking about tarniq, let's remember that we are really talking about* piggusarniq *(personal development) and that this is always related to our hearts.* Tarniq *creates* ikpinianiq *(feeling), and we are made up of feelings and emotion. People who are not* pilimmaksarniqtuujuq *cannot* isumaksuqsiuq *(apply thought to issues).*

# How you can learn more

Continually planning and preparing for a good future is considered an Inuit *maligarjuaq*. As part of *inunnguiniq*, Inuit were trained from very early to think deeply and strategically, to seek out and conserve resources. Being prepared for unexpected situations and learning how to live well, based on what is available to you, are ways that Inuit survived in the face of harsh and difficult times. Remember, parenting never ends until you die. You will always be someone's parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, cousin and friend. It is important to continually become as knowledgeable as possible to support every child through *inunnguiniq*.



***In Iqaluit, a young person said to me, "Though I am an Inuk, I am such an incomplete person. I would like to know how I need to live in order for me to become more complete." There are two different ways to live – one that came from our traditional way and the new way. Though we cannot see it, one of the ways of living is not tolerant and appreciative of the other, and this is causing the other way of living to deteriorate. Though we can't change the course of things, we can still learn to be prepared – just in case our society has to face something tremendously difficult. The way we are now makes me concerned about the state of our future. If something difficult were to happen now, the way we are today, I fear we may not be a stable enough society and too weak to deal well with a very bad situation.***

**-Mariano Aupilaarjuq**

If you are having difficulty finding resources in any of these areas and would like more information, please look at the following websites:

### Pirurvik Centre

pirurvik.ca

### National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

nccih.ca

### Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families

inuuqatigiit.ca

### Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre

qhrc.ca

### Tungasuvvingat Inuit

tiontario.ca

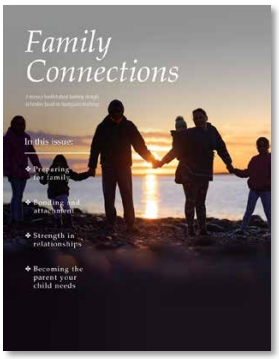
### Aqqiumavvik Society

aqqiumavvik.com

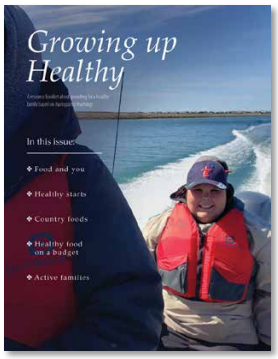
### Mamisarvik Healing Centre

tiontario.ca/programs/mamisarvik-healing-centre

The booklets in this series include:




## Family Connections




## Growing up Healthy

## Fatherhood is Forever

## Parents as First Teachers

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