



Comfort Foods

People who have been far from home and away from familiar foods and habits know about “comfort foods”. The opening up of a care package of foods and flavorings evokes home and a flood of positive emotions. Those who are physically uncomfortable—such as during a long road trip or an uncomfortable couple days of camping—will also find foods that create positive feelings and thoughts, beyond the physical sustenance of the food.

What are Comfort Foods?

“Comfort foods” are those that improve a person’s emotional and mental state. These vary based on people’s palates and histories (past associations) with food. People do have rituals around food, and their experiences with food may evoke a range of emotions—some considered positive (nostalgia) and others negative (stress or anxiety).

These foods may be sweet or savory (salty). They may be hot or cold. Their textures may be crunchy or chewy. Some types of comfort foods are home-made while others are store-bought. They may be highly

common foods, or they may be novelty or unusual ones (like cotton candy at the fair).

Cultural influences also affect when certain foods are eaten and what they mean. (About.com suggests that there are 25 top American comfort foods, based on a readers’ poll, including apple pie, baked beans, banana pudding, beef stew, brisket pot roast, chicken and dumplings, chicken pot pie, chicken soup, chili, chocolate chip cookies, corn on the cob, fried chicken, gelatin, green bean casserole, hot dogs, ice cream, macaroni & cheese, mashed potatoes, meatloaf, potato salad, pumpkin pie, shepherd’s pie, spaghetti, tomato soup, and tuna casserole).

Gender and Comfort Food Preferences

Another survey found ice cream to be the leading comfort food. Some food research has found that men and women crave different types of comfort foods, with women leaning towards sweet treats, and men seeking hot and savory dishes. Many prefer foods that provide a sense of fullness (“stick-to-your-ribs” fare). Certain food preferences affirm certain identity aspects in people, too—with certain food choices affirming identity aspects.

Part of personal well-being and health involves the ability to provide self-comfort. This self-comfort may involve exercise or discussions with friends or other methods that help defuse the tension but that also may not compound the initial challenge with further challenges.

Keeping Some Healthy Comfort Foods on Hand

Comfort foods, if kept in moderation, may be positive. This assumes that the comfort foods do not add calories to the usual diet, and the comfort foods do not lead to a dietary imbalance.



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