

Cultural considerations: Food as Nurturing

Food is one of our most important experiences. We have a lifelong relationship to food, with strong social and cultural significance. We develop likes and dislikes of food depending upon our habitual experience with it. Some of our favorite foods may be nutritional disasters, but signify love and community to us like nothing else can.

Foods we never ate as children because they were unavailable to us or culturally taboo or disdained, may in adult life, become crucial to our sense of taking care of ourselves. And along with food, our dining habits are also vital to us. Eating alone may have wonderful or dreadful connotations. Eating in community may be the same. Certain utensils and settings may be as important as the nourishment they accompany.

In some cultures, eating in the kitchen is not only the norm but the criteria of comfort or hospitality. Belching or slurping may be expressions of pleasure or considered unsocial. Conversations or silences may be necessary for enjoyment or distractions to it. Even the order of foods at a meal may be very important. Sweet before savory; hot before cold; solid before liquid, or the opposites.

Food is also the way that people show their love and express nurturing to their loved ones. When food is no longer a positive or necessary experience for a person, their families and friends may become anxious, not knowing other ways to express their care.

It is important to look at our own preferences and assumptions and prejudices about eating and feeding, and consider how to be with another's experience of this, especially in the setting of end of life care.

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