



Gayle Eaglewoman (Crow Creek Sioux) passes by the quick stop stores while traveling.

How to Survive the Miles and the Temptations

Eating healthy while driving cross country
just takes a little planning and a cooler . . .

Cross-country travel is a common Native tradition. Many times a year Native people take to the road to “have a visit” with relatives at other tribes, dance at powwows, share food at potlatches, and cheer at rodeos. We crisscross the map to get to families and familiar sights.

The tradition of cross-country traveling has been around for centuries. But the method of travel and the food eaten has vastly changed.

What used to be physical feats on horseback or on foot have turned into 10-hour days spent sitting behind a steering wheel. The snack items used to be dried game, berries or roots, eaten by a creek or next to the warmth of a fire.

It Might be Quick But . . .

Now drivers are tempted to fill up on fast foods offered at gas stations or quick stop stores. These quick foods stop hunger and give us relief from the long hours spent on the road.

Walk into the “Quick and Go,” grab something deep-fried, sweet or salty and an icy-cold jumbo drink, and you’re back on the road! That’s a habit many of us might have, one we might want to re-think.

For people with diabetes, or those wanting to lose weight or not gain weight, eating while traveling presents a challenge. But with a little planning, it can be done. You can eat healthy while you are on the road.

Road Time is Still Diabetes Prevention Time

Debbie Gardipee-Reyes (Blackfeet) is a nutrition assistant who lives in Washington State and often travels to Idaho and Montana. Diabetes is a major concern for her and her family. Both sets of her grandparents have diabetes as well as her mother and a niece.

Eating healthy on the road is a way of protecting herself, her husband and her two sons. She says the key to healthy travel eating is to be prepared.

Less Money, More Nutrition

“Bring a cooler and pack your own groceries,” says Debbie. Packing your own food will make it easier for you to

pass by the goodies offered at roadside stores. Debbie also notes that bringing her own food saves money because remote stores usually charge more.

Lee Timentwa (Yakama) has diabetes and knows well the temptations of eating on the road. Her husband is a Colville tribal member, and they often drive there to visit relatives. "I used to stop at every store along the way to get a candy bar," she says.

When Lee found out she had diabetes, she knew that she needed to change her eating habits, including what she ate while traveling. "Now, I pack apples or carrots. And I bring bottled water," says Lee.

Lee's husband Ernie does not have diabetes, but to show support he also snacks on fruits and vegetables.

"I once told him to go ahead and eat a candy bar, but he didn't," says Lee.

For the Love of Family

For many, traveling cross country is a family affair. Debbie always travels with her husband and sons. Sometimes her brother Paul Gardipee and his large family come along too.

From their home in western Washington, they travel to Idaho to cheer on Debbie's sister Karla Fitzpatrick when she competes in the Indian Relay Races at the Nampa Rodeo. They travel to Kalispel, Montana, to visit relatives. And they often drive to Browning, Montana, for North American Indian Days.

Chart Your Food Course

Choosing healthy food has

become a habit for Debbie's family. There are still some challenges. Her sons get tempted by the ice cold cans of pop displayed in stores. Sometimes it's hard to walk by the deep-fried foods and sugar and salt-filled snacks.

The Gardipee family overcomes the temptations by having their own healthy snacks ready and easy to reach: plastic bags filled with cut-up fruits and vegetables, pita

pocket sandwiches made with lean meats, a bag of pretzels, iced tea and low-fat milk.

Although healthy eating on the road requires thinking ahead and a bit of self-control, Debbie thinks it has great benefits. She is helping her family learn how to make good food choices. And no one in her family has diabetes.

"We're trying to keep it that way," she says.



The secret to helping your family eat healthy on a road trip is to be prepared. Before leaving, fill your cooler with whole-grain snacks, lean meats, fruits, vegetables and water to save money and have healthy foods handy.