



Conflicting demands



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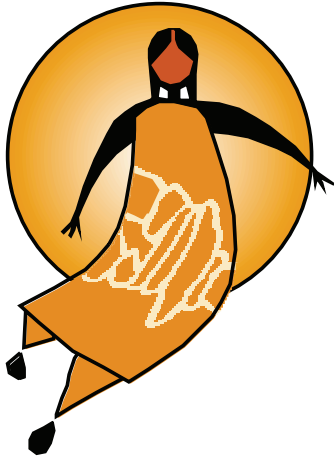
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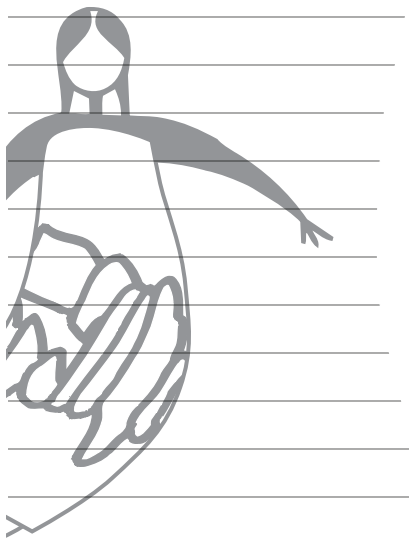
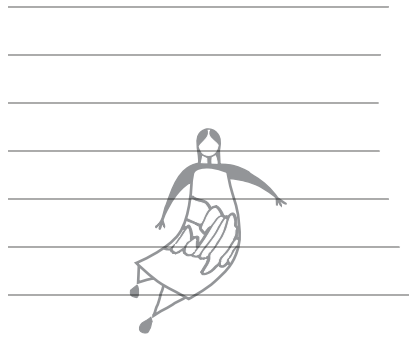


Theme 3: Conflicting demands



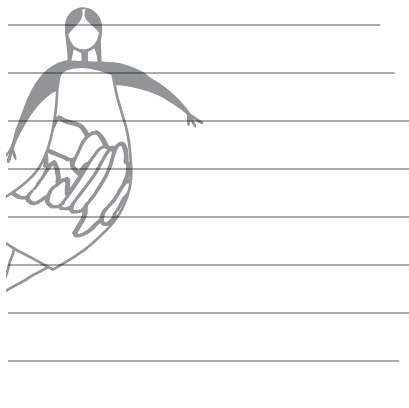
Jeanne has noticed that there are more and more diabetic people. Even so, others think that although they have the symptoms, it's impossible for them to have the disease. Ten years ago, when she found out she had it, she didn't want to believe it. I thought it was for others, she says today. She now thinks that it was almost inevitable for her to contract it, given her eating habits and her lack of physical activity. She takes medication and uses traditional medicine to help her control her diabetes. She takes particular care of her feet due to her fear of complications, because a close relative of hers had to undergo an amputation. It bothers her to see that some people think diabetes is nothing - when they get it, they tell others about it as if they were saying they had the flu. She sometimes feels shy doing physical activity, especially since a member of the community accused her of exercising to get slimmer, and she thinks that several women feel the same way she does. She prefers doing individual exercises at her own pace, like walking. When people look at her, she tells them that if they don't like it, they can look somewhere else, say what they want to, or even talk to her about it if it bothers them. Even so, it still hurts and sometimes she gets discouraged. Why shouldn't she be allowed to walk on the street?





When it comes to food, the diet imposed by diabetes is hard to combine with her everyday life. For example, since her mother lives with her and her children, she sees them eat food that she's always enjoyed, like white bread, butter and fatty foods. Her mother says it tastes good. Of course, it tastes good, but it's unhealthy and bad for the body. Jeanne knows more and more what is good for her. Her daughter was a great help by going grocery shopping with her and helping her make healthy menus. She's kept her new-found good habits even though her daughter has since left home. Her family is more and more aware of what diabetes is and even shows concern for her. Slowly but surely she's changed her eating habits, for example, by switching from white bread to whole wheat bread. She sometimes eats badly or has a few drinks. As she says, even though the nutritionist repeatedly tells her what she has to eat, she is the only one capable of deciding who will control her sugar level. When she leaves the dispensary, she sees people eating chips, chocolate and candy every night, and it hurts her. She tries to teach them to change certain habits, for example, drinking diet soft drinks instead of regular ones. She finds strength in her reading on diabetes, and tries hard to be aware of any new development. Her daughter helped her a great deal. She believes that awareness should start among the young people, who she believes are much more open and willing to change their eating habits. There is always hope for the children, she says.

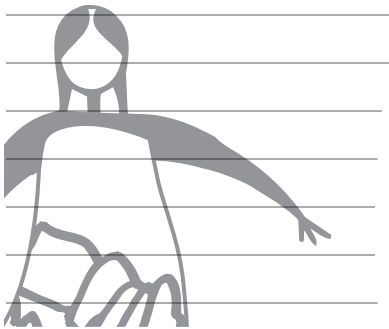
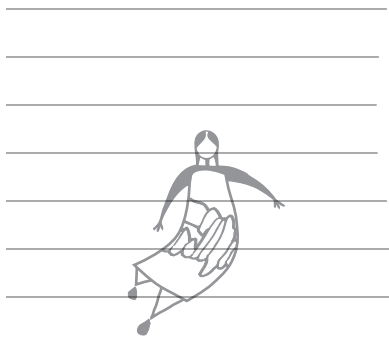
1. What role do women play in the life of our village?



Diabetes is a new responsibility added to the many others we have as women, mothers, grand-mothers or spouses.

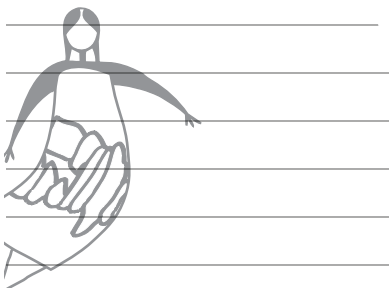


2. Do our duties as women keep us from taking care of ourselves?



It adds to the obligations brought on by our job outside the household, if we have one. Society and we ourselves have given us a role to play in the community and in our family, and this role is very often big enough to take up all our time, including the few spare moments which we might use to take care of ourselves. One of the things women's activities have in common is that they're directed towards other people. We pursue others' happiness before pursuing our own- sometimes even before taking care of our own health. Is it that hard to take care of ourselves? Not necessarily, and it's sometimes a source of great satisfaction, a gratification found nowhere else. As one woman put it, the love we have for our children is like a big bag of candy. But then along comes diabetes, which takes up a big part of our time and demands a lot of attention and concentration. Part of our energy has to be dedicated to what we eat and how we do things. We may then feel selfish, egocentric; we may think we are bad mothers or wives.

3. How can we as mothers take care of others without forgetting ourselves?

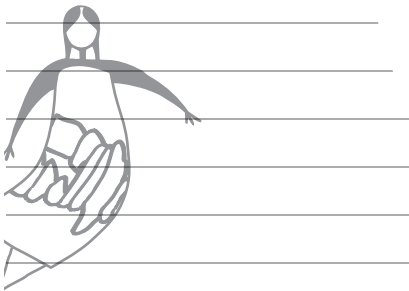
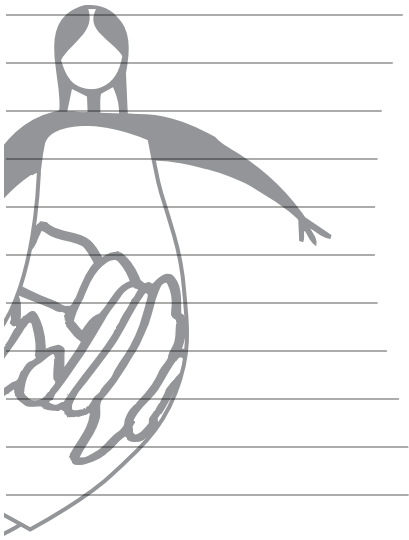
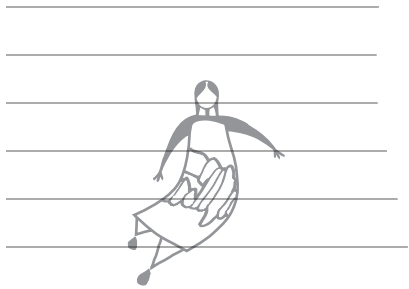


Is trying to stay healthy that selfish?

Then there is the dispensary and everything they try to teach us there. They repeat the same thing over and over again. Do they really take into consideration the gulf between their ideal view of reality and the actual experience of people in the community?



4. Can we buy fruit and vegetables in our community?
If so, do we buy any?



Once we're outside the clinic, will we really be capable of buying the fruit and vegetables suggested, or going for a walk when there are dishes to do? Is it easy to change our cooking habits when we've been feeding our family a certain way for years? Is it easy to resist candy and chocolate when people all around us eat it and offer us some?

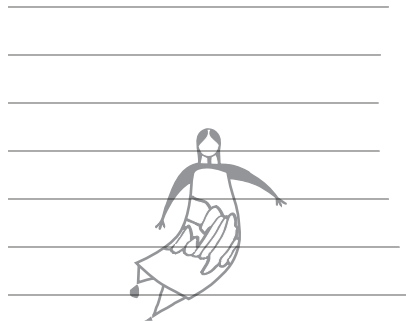
Many are the conflicts, or contradictions between what we should do to control our diabetes and the reality of our lifestyle and our obligations as women, mothers, wives, grandmothers, etc. In a nutshell, our background wants us to be the same when we are no longer the same person.



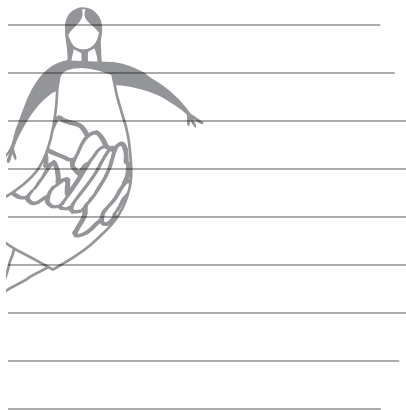
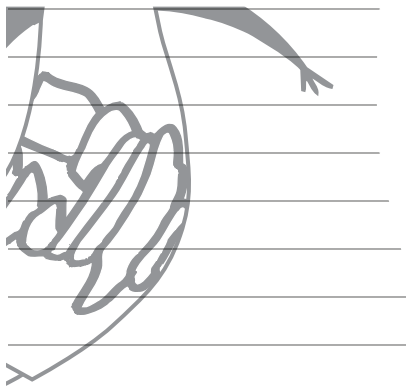
Photo : Claudette Fontaine, coll. M.E.Q.



The Role Food Plays in Our Lives



5. What place does food hold in our lives?
6. What is a good meal?



Food is the basis of life everywhere in the world. We need food to live but what makes it special is that it gives us the occasion to treat ourselves, to be treated, to be united with and to share with our family and friends. Being able to buy the food we want is a sign of success. Going out to the restaurant is also a way of maintaining family ties and friendships.

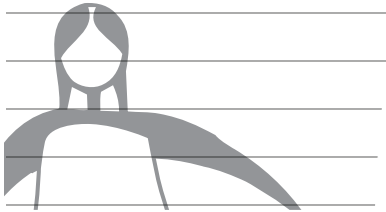
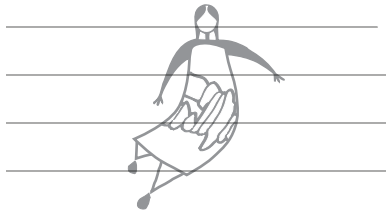
What we eat has a meaning that can go back to childhood.

A meal can be a sign of belonging to a certain culture. For example, eating forest game is significant in many ways. Preparing makuchan with other women puts us at the service of the community; it makes us feel competent as women. On the other hand, if we start eating tomatoes and lettuce, if we abandon bannock for whole wheat bread bought at the corner store, will we fully feel Aboriginal? But being Aboriginal is much more than what we eat. It is more a way of being than of doing, and that way of being can evolve as new realities arise.

Several women, when they were young, were too poor to buy certain foods. Later on, when they became independent, started their family, and managed their own budget, they bought what they had always dreamt about.

What happened to me when I was growing up? We had no food in the house. We had no food. My father used to hunt. Anything that had feathers and fur, we ate it. And when I was on my own, I stopped eating stuff like that. Now I eat junk food. There are only two of us in the house but you should see my fridge, you would fall down. It's so full... when Friday comes, I have to clean it, and I throw out all kinds of stuff.





But when I go grocery shopping, I spend over a hundred dollars. There's only two of us. But I have got to have that food.



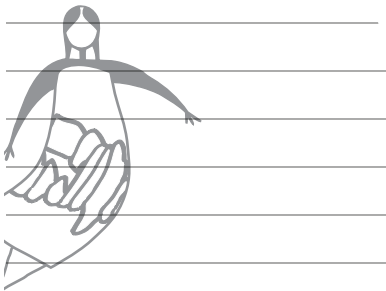
The more you ate, the better you were, not a long time ago.



We got into the habit, maybe we picked it up at home, of cooking in large quantities. We've kept that habit, even today. Yet there are just the two of us at home, and I still cook a lot of food. My daughter is fat and I know she needs to lose weight. My son and my husband are fat too.

In most villages, women say that they have few things to entertain themselves with and that food is something to fill the emptiness.

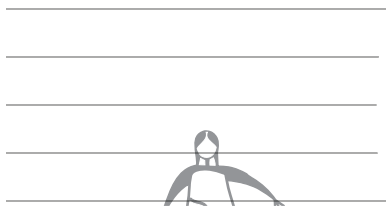
7. How do we feel when we don't have very much food and how do we feel when we have a lot?



And having a lot of food in the fridge, especially when we didn't always had enough, is reassuring. We feel rich, and we can be generous to others. We're under the impression that we're fulfilling our role as parents to the utmost. It becomes a habit, and habits are hard to break even if we're aware of the changes we should make. Being conscious of the reasons we spoil our children with treats rather than with meals that are good for their health, having the time and willingness to listen, practising prevention- these are all steps towards breaking our bad habits.



Taking care of ourselves



Many women were never taught to think of themselves. They learn instead that to bring pride to their name, they should forget about themselves and think of others. A woman who neglects her household or doesn't prepare her children's meals is not a good mother.

8. If we walk alone in the village, what might happen? What do people say to us? How do we feel about it?



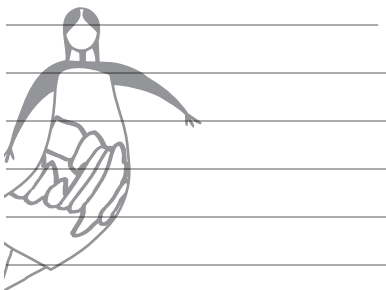
I work for my children first, then for myself.

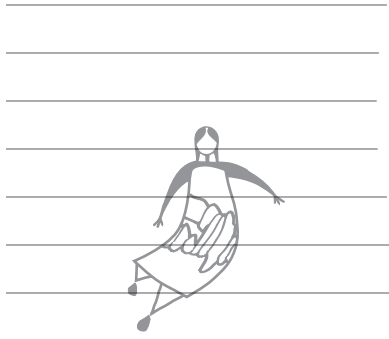


It's funny- we have the energy to take care of our children, our animals and we come in last. The animals and the children come first.



We always think of others; we live according to their needs. As Anne says, when she has guests, she'll work hard to prepare for them. I think it's a serious problem. We tend always to be thinking of others, and we forget ourselves in the process. Take mothers, for example. The other day I listened to one who was old enough. She is diabetic but her children and husband aren't. She says that what's important is that her children and husband eat properly. In the meanwhile, she forgets herself

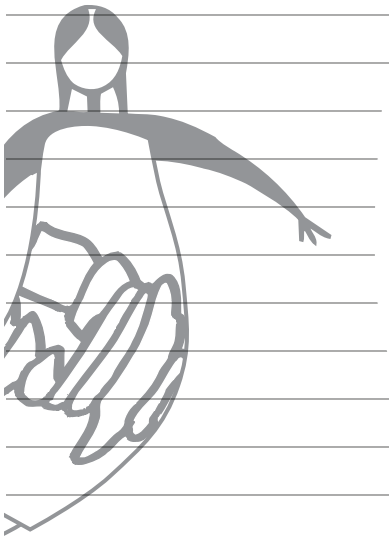




The children, the husbands, the guests, even the pets, come before our health and our equilibrium. Once the children have left home, some women will start taking care of themselves and may regret not having done it before.

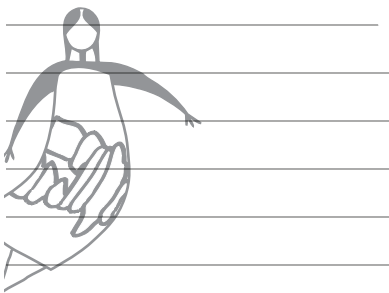


My children are all gone. We've been alone for 7 or 8 years. And I like it ! I don't care how he reacts. I like it. I don't have to listen, I don't have to do that anymore. I can be on a diet if I want to.



When my children were at home I never thought about myself. I always did everything for them, make them do all kinds of stuff, teach them. When I had the kids, I didn't have time to exercise, anything like that. I was taking care of them. Now I'm able to take care of myself. And I take advantage of that. I know I should've done it years ago.

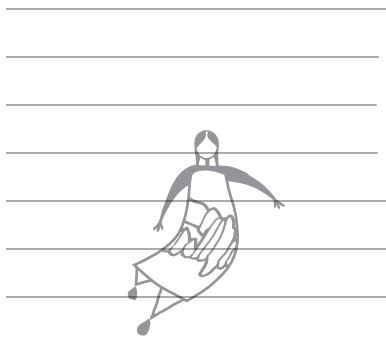
Thinking of what is best for us could also be what is best for our family. Do you feel constantly spied on, followed, watched? If our children never leave us alone, maybe it's because they don't trust themselves to do what could be best for them. And perhaps the best thing for them would be to learn to take care of themselves. It's hard for us to accept that they can do without us.



• It's hard to do things for yourself?
• Yeah. It is. I have to hide when I go out the door. The last time I went to visit a friend, I swear I wasn't there ten minutes, the phone started ringing. Four times it rang. I said, "I might as well go home." They call me over silly things, you know. They want to make sure I'm there. If I go out the door, or the minute I want to do something for myself, they will be right behind me. I can't do anything.



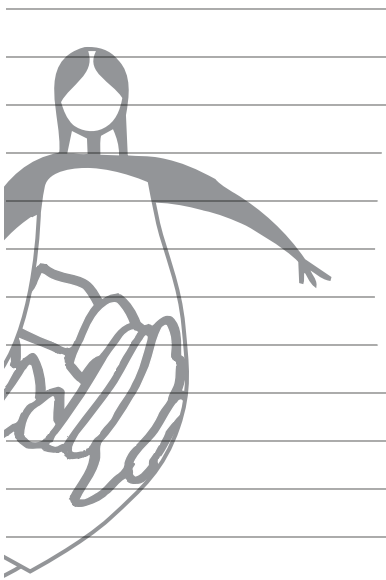
9. As women, how can we show that we have the right to walk alone without being bothered?



Learning to set our limits is possible at any age. It is part of the respect we deserve from ourselves and from others. Our children may be grateful one day for the sense of responsibility and independence they've acquired.



I put a lot of stability into my life, in my role as a mother also. I think that I taught my children to be responsible for their own lives. That's important.



I told my children that I had done my part, that I had fulfilled my role as a mother and that it was their turn. I will agree to baby-sit my grandchildren but not during work hours. Sometimes I won't agree to baby-sit on weekends or I may agree to for only a few hours. I have to think of myself. I had many children, a big family. I think I've given enough of my time to my family. It doesn't mean my grandchildren aren't my little treasures. They still come quite often to my house anyway. But I taught my children to be responsible for their own children. When I baby-sit them, I do it with love.

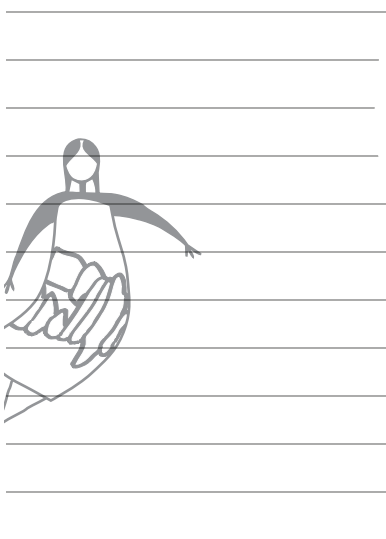
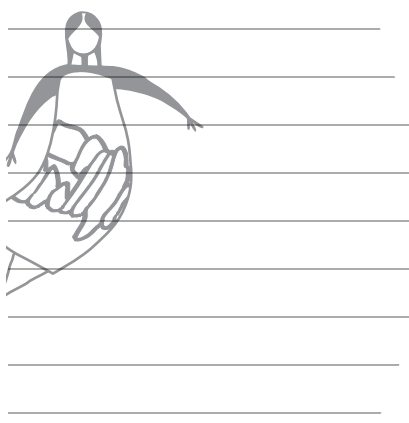
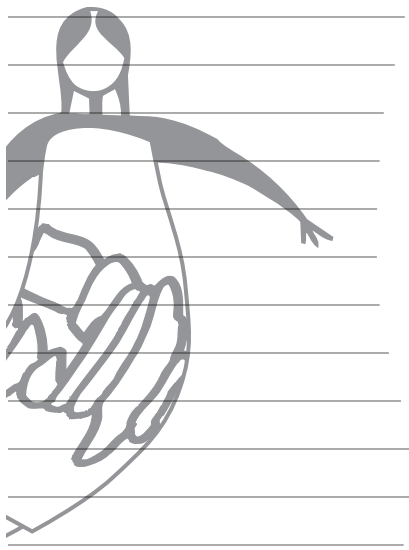
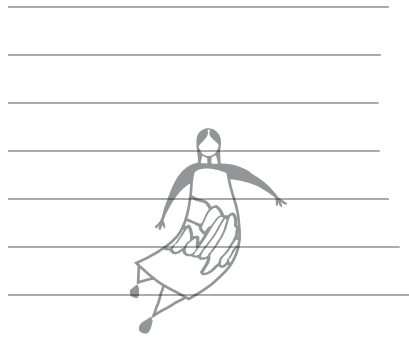


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Feeding Our Loved Ones and Ourselves



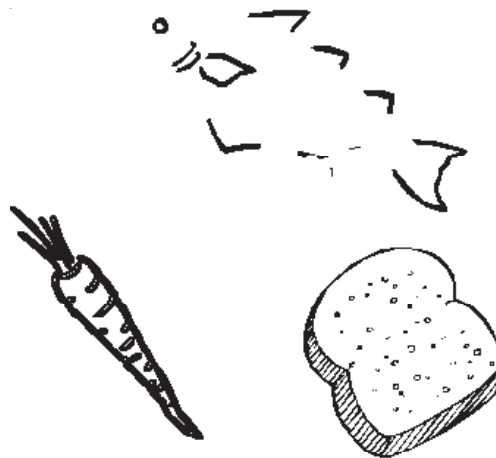
Buying groceries, preparing a meal, and eating imply spending a considerable amount of time and money. With the diet that goes hand in hand with diabetes, we could imagine it implies doing everything twice - getting groceries for those who are diabetic and getting groceries for those who are not. The same goes for cooking - it takes two different meals. It may also be that we simply can't afford the extra spending on fruit and vegetables.



I find it very hard to make myself a meal and to make another one for my son. And to do groceries for myself and groceries for my son. It's very expensive. When you don't make much money, buying twice as much food is very expensive. That could be why some diabetics don't watch what they eat, because they have to feed their children too.

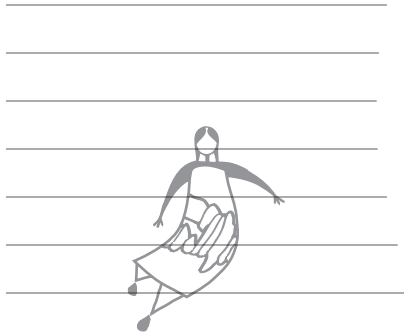


When I have guests, I tell myself, "I can't give them my food to eat. They're not diabetic, they can eat anything."





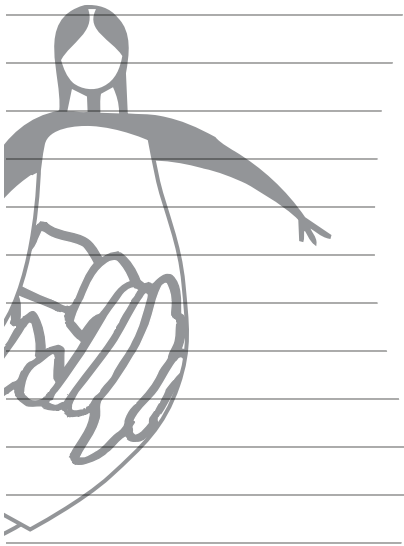
My family likes fast food, but I don't like it very much. Anyway, my boy doesn't eat vegetables, he doesn't eat carrots. How long have carrots existed? He hardly ever eats carrots or beets, and he never eats broccoli or cauliflower. But I eat some. When you cook for two, it's much more complicated.



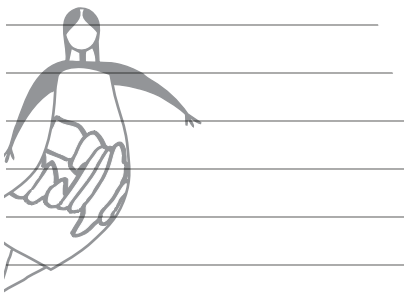
We wouldn't want our children or our guests to be deprived of anything because we are diabetic. Everything will carry on as usual for them and we will follow our diet as best we can, after they've been taken care of. Money-wise, if resources are limited, we have to make choices, between our diet and our family's fast food. The constant contact we have with food that we can't eat any more can be very painful and sometimes pushes us to abandon our determination.

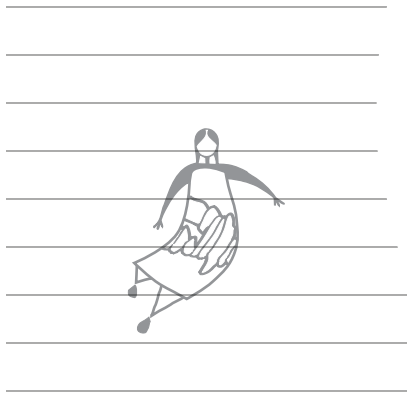


I bought pork chops and gravy. What will happen if I help myself to some? My husband said, "That looks good." I can't eat any of this, but I buy it anyway. But sometimes you can't say, "I'll pass." You can't do that all the time.

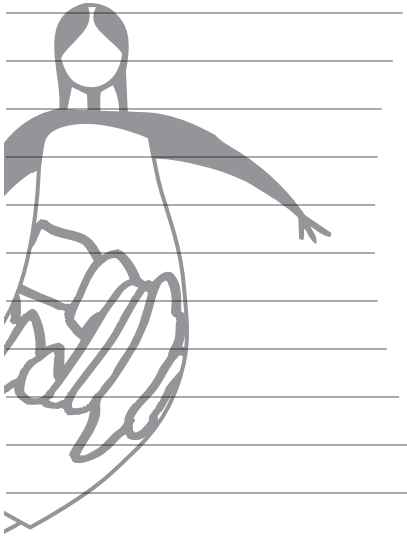


We have to choose anyway, so why not choose differently from the way we always have? Some women believe that their children should get used to eating differently when they're young, even if it's hard for them.

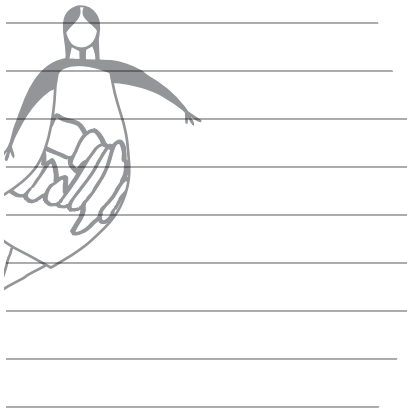




When I have guests, I don't make them anything different. For example, my nephew spends weekends with us. He's going to eat the spaghetti sauce that I make, without any sugar or salt. Slowly but surely he's getting used to it. He drinks sugar-free juice; he doesn't have any choice. He stays with us and eats what we eat. Of course we spoil him from time to time. We'll buy something else for him. But we try to make him eat the same things we do. It's hard, it's very hard for the young ones. I think we really have to get them used to it when they're small, not when they're 12.



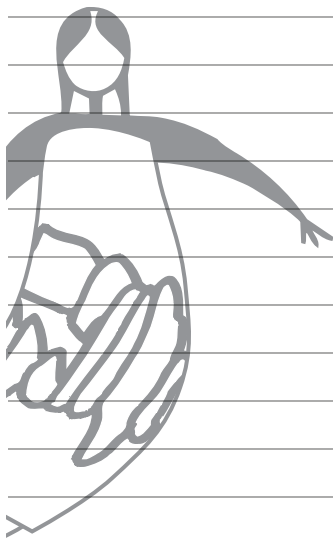
Some parents follow the recommendations and some parents don't. For example, they say they don't have any money to buy healthy food products, but they have money to buy chips. The problem is that they don't want to.



The Family - An Obstacle or a Source of Motivation?

We give our patience, time, love and money to our family. There are many extended families in the community; grandparents, parents and children may all live under the same roof.

10. What can we do to learn to stand up for ourselves?



Sometimes my mother tells me, “I bought candy.” She knows I’m diabetic but buys some and offers me some anyway. She knows I’m going to eat some.



Nobody was happy about my diet, because I wanted to eat differently and I was the one who did the cooking. After a week I gave up. Then they were all happy and exclaimed, “We can finally eat!”

Your family hasn’t changed. You have. You will never be the same and now you have to take more care of yourself. On the other hand, you can’t ask your family to do the work for you. It will be your job to teach them about your new reality and your new limitations.

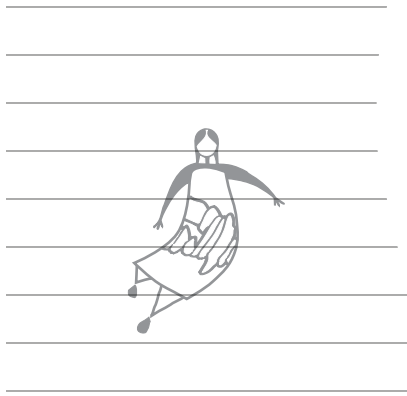
11. How can we place ourselves at the centre of our lives?



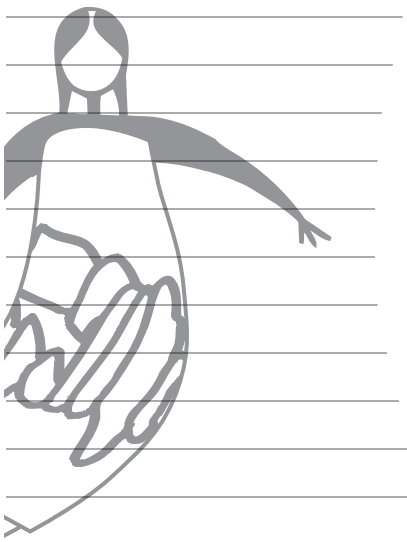
Most of all, you have to know yourself. I would never say to myself, “My husband asks me to do something; therefore I have to do it.” I don’t work for others, I work for myself. If my husband asks me something or if he gets angry over dirty dishes I tell him, “Do the dishes yourself if you don’t want them to stay there. I’m going for a walk.”

It’s a big challenge but learning to stand up for yourself and caring for yourself are winning strategies.





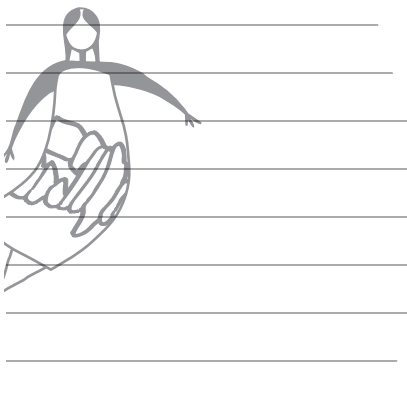
I taught my children that in the morning I go to work, they have to get up by themselves and make their breakfast. I'm not there to do it for them. When I started working, I taught my boy and girl to wash their clothes and to clean their rooms, and to take care of the basement and the second floor. I do my washing, I wash the towels, the dish towels. My children learned to be self-sufficient and now we share chores, everyone does their job. I tell myself that since three of us are messing up the house, three of us will clean it.



Family isn't necessarily an obstacle. It can be your main source of motivation, even your most important support. Just as when our mothers warned us about taking a piece of cake, we get support from our daughters, who want to watch their weight and show us how to buy better food, or from our youngest ones who know how to prepare our insulin. The danger is in giving up good habits when the helping person is no longer there. The motivation has to come from inside for those good habits to last.



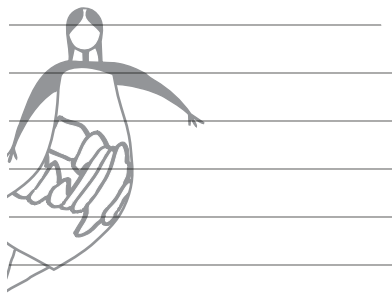
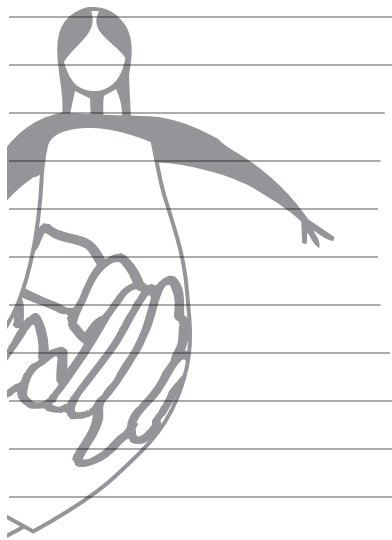
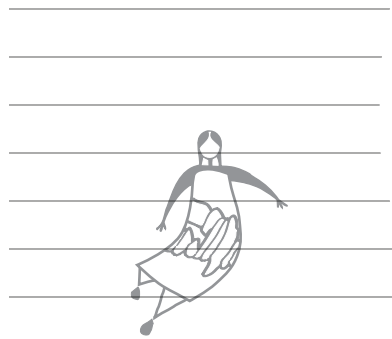
I often had problems and I kept them inside, I didn't talk about them. At one point I told myself, "I have to take care of myself, I have children." My children are always on my mind, they're important to me. I have to think of my children, I have to keep going, I have to find the strength to help them. When something goes wrong, I always have my children and my husband by my side.



It's up to me to decide how I'm going to live. I've always held on to the love I have for my children. I tell myself that if my husband rejects the love I give him, I'll give it all to my children. I'll take more care of them. I'll show them I love them. The love I give my children is like a big bag of candy. That's it. Children know you love them, and they come to you with their hardships, their joys, They bring everything to you.



12. How much longer will we be able to take care of our loved ones if we don't take care of ourselves?



As a woman, you feel responsible for the well-being of others. But if you want to go on being the pillar of the family, you have to think of yourself - if you want to be by their side as long as possible, healthy and happy. The socially-created differences between men and women can become your ally.



Men, They don't understand. For them, it's not a real sickness, so they don't think they have to control it. But women want to control it. They want to live longer, they want to have a healthy lifestyle but men, no. A woman wants to see her children and grand-children grow old. A woman knows that she has to be there for her children. And most of the women here on the reserve, they're the head of the household. They're the ones who make sure that the bills are paid, they're the ones that make sure the kids have clothes. So they seem to know that they have to be there for their children, and they take it more seriously.



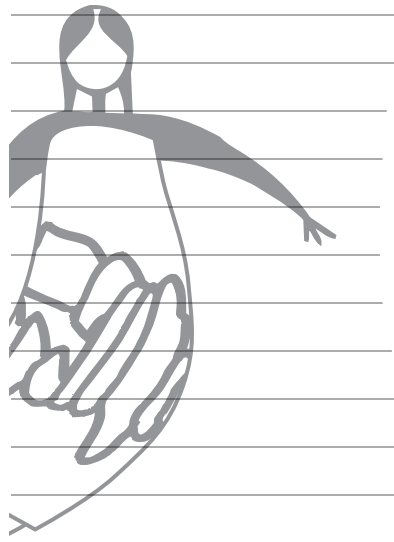
Finding a Balance



Learning to strike the right balance regarding the many different needs clamouring for our restricted time and energy requires much determination and creativity. You are capable of this creativity.



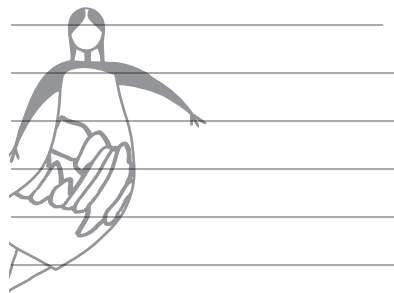
I put a lot of balance into what I do. In every area. That's because at one point, I realized that I was exhausting myself, and that I was forgetting myself.



Finding a balance could mean getting your family used to eating differently, and facing their criticism gently but firmly.



Sometimes I invite my mom over to eat. Well, she says that when I make a meal, I don't add any salt or pepper. And for a while, she pointed out to me, "This doesn't have enough salt." I said, "No, here I don't add salt or pepper. You know that. There's salt and pepper on the table. You add it to your plate." My children are used not to adding salt.



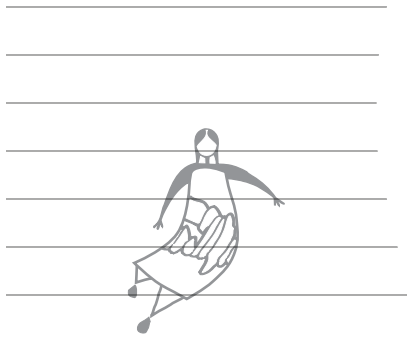
Finding the right balance also means changing our schedule so that we can enjoy as many quiet moments as possible when our children are home and thus avoid sacrificing our health.



You have to take time for yourself. But as a single parent, it's hard to do that. When I'm alone on weekends, that's when I walk. Eight miles and back. I do that twice a week, on weekends, when the children are not home. But when they're home, it'll be shorter walks.

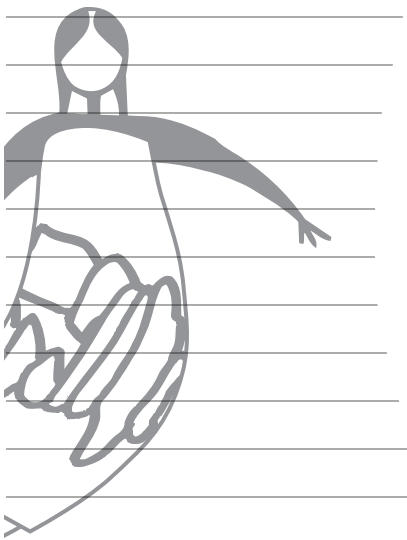
If we make our loved ones aware of our new eating habits, maybe they'll give us fruit instead of the usual chocolate.





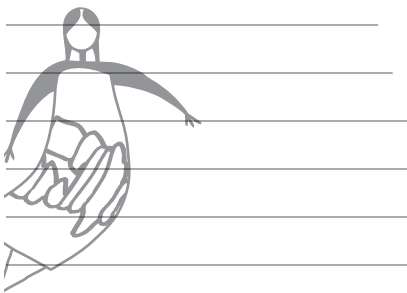
I teach men. I have some boys and I teach them. I tell them, and they'll buy me fruit, or they'll buy me bananas, or they'll buy me something, whatever they can afford and give it to me. Sometimes I can't afford these things, but they give them to me.

Taking the time to cook differently can add to the pleasure eating gives us.



• It does take longer to bake, broil or boil food than it does to put it in the frying pan and there you go, it's ready. It takes a lot of patience. But if you're willing to do it, then you'll do it.

- And the taste?
- *Oh, I like it, I prefer it now! I wish I had eaten this way all my life.*



Suggested questions for facilitators

1. What role do women play in the life of our village?
2. Do our duties as women keep us from taking care of ourselves?
3. How can we as mothers take care of others without forgetting ourselves?
4. Can we buy fruit and vegetables in our community? If so, do we buy any?
5. What place does food hold in our lives?
6. What is a good meal?
7. How do we feel when we don't have very much food and how do we feel when we have a lot?
8. If we walk alone in the village, what might happen? What do people say to us? How do we feel about it?
9. As women, how can we show that we have the right to walk alone without being bothered?
10. What can we do to learn to stand up for ourselves?
11. How can we place ourselves at the centre of our lives?
12. How much longer will we be able to take care of our loved ones if we don't take care of ourselves?





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