

# Soothing our Soul with Food

*By Bill Bradley, Registered Dietitian and Cookbook Author*

People seem to have a hard time agreeing on anything lately, but one thing for sure is we are going through tumultuous times. Weather disasters, shootings, and political showdowns are making a lot of people on edge. These experiences can lead to increased anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, depression and loneliness. One way that many of us take care of our stress is by eating. Traditional American comfort foods like macaroni and cheese, lasagna, hamburgers, French fries, ice cream and cake once eaten only on special occasions have become a daily occurrence for many. “Stress eating” can become a habit, like drinking or smoking. Both short term and long-term health problems can develop such as gastric reflux, malaise, obesity, and diabetes, for example.

I find that when I’m feeling down making a healthy meal and sharing it with others helps reduce the stress and anxiety. If I’m feeling sorry for myself, giving to others helps more than any bowl of ice cream ever could. Here are some ways to soothe your soul with food.

**Bring food to someone in need** – There is no one more appreciative than a person who receives food when they are sick. Bring some homemade chicken soup to your friend who has a cold (just don’t get too close) or make a meal for someone who is going through a tough time. It will make you feel good too!

**Have a potluck that honors someone you love** – Gratitude is often the best medicine. Have a surprise potluck for a friend or family member just because you love them. Again, you will both feel better afterwards.

**Eat comfort food that soothes you and your belly** – My favorite comfort foods now are the ones that I ate in the Mediterranean, foods that are delicious and healthy for me. Spinach pies with feta, Greek salad, vegetables baked in the oven, sweet potato fries and occasionally, meatballs made with grass fed beef. Experiment with different foods and find the ones you like the best. Every part of you will thank you afterwards.

**Make gifts of food for the holidays** – People love homemade holiday gifts as long as they are really tasty! Roasted nuts with dark chocolate chunks, oatmeal cookies made with olive oil, spice rubs, jams and jellies, trail mix or granola all make great gifts. Have friends over to make holiday food gifts and you will double the pleasure!

**Make yourself a relaxing candlelight dinner** – Spend a night being totally good to yourself. Get a massage, buy some amazing food, light a candle and just relax. Watch your favorite inspirational movie, read a great book, take a bath....

Soothing yourself with food comes down to eating food that is calming and good for your body, being part of community, giving to others and giving to yourself. It is about bringing yourself into a place of loving calmness. Enjoy the happy meals ahead!

