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# Traditional Siletz Health Practices

**Instructions:** With your group, read the following information about traditional Siletz health practices and discuss and write answers to the discussion questions that follow. Be prepared to share with the whole class.

## Overview

The ancestors of the Siletz people today come from across western Oregon as well as parts of southwestern Washington and northern California. Even though all these peoples spoke different languages and lived in ways specially adapted to their local environment, they shared some similar ways of understanding good health and well-being that created a healthy, thriving population of people before the arrival of settlers.

## Eating Healthily

Indigenous people in western Oregon ate plants and animals found near their homes throughout the year—working during the summer to store food for the winter months. Eating locally and seasonally in this way provided a diet that was rich in protein and nutrients and healthy fats. Salmon was one of the most important food sources for most of the people living in western Oregon and remains a critical part of the diet of many Siletz families to this day. People didn't eat highly processed foods like we eat today and didn't consume refined grains, sugar, or artificial additives.

## Staying Active

Siletz ancestors were active. Foraging and hunting for food, gathering firewood, and preparing meals required physical work and helped to create active bodies. People also valued physical training as an important part of a person's physical and spiritual life. Active games and sports like shinny, wrestling, and footraces also helped people stay fit and connect with others.

## Keeping Clean

Native peoples in western Oregon valued personal hygiene. Frequent sweats—followed by bathing in cold rivers—were an important part of daily life for people from many Tribes. Siletz ancestors used soap-like plant materials for washing and groomed themselves with fats and oils to keep their skin and hair healthy. Most folks chewed plant material to keep their teeth strong and healthy. After people were removed to reservations and forced to adapt to a grain-based diet, outside observers often marveled at the health of the teeth of elders who had grown up eating a traditional diet.

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## **Traditional Siletz Health Practices** *(Continued)*

### **Plant Medicine**

Over thousands of years, Siletz people developed a deep, specialized knowledge of local plants and how they could be used for medicine. Specially trained healers passed down this knowledge through each generation, using various herbs and plants to treat all manner of injuries, illnesses, and skin conditions.

### **Environmental Practices**

Siletz people maintained social norms to protect and care for the land, plants, and animals that they relied on for food, clothing, and shelter. People actively managed the landscape to ensure a reliable supply of food through techniques like controlled burns that helped encourage healthy plant growth and aid in hunting. Strict prohibitions on waste and sharing resources with neighboring peoples helped to prevent over-hunting and fishing so that people could be sure that they would always have what they needed from the environment.

### **Community Connections**

Though not everyone was equal in village society, Indigenous people in western Oregon took care to make sure that each person in the community had enough food to eat. People lived together in extended family groups as part of closely related villages tied together through shared routines, celebrations, and ceremonies. Villages often came together to play sports and gamble and attended each other's dances and ceremonial events. Under the direction of a headman, families worked together to gather food and resources, looked out for each other, and helped each other take care of children and elders.

### **Spirituality**

Siletz people live their lives according to a set of teachings passed down through the generations. These traditions show people how to live and how to treat each other so that the world will remain in balance and continue forward. Stories passed down through generations help to guide children and empower each person to live a life grounded in connection with other Tribal people, the land, the animals and plants around us, and the creator.

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## **Traditional Siletz Health Practices** *(Continued)*

### **Discussion Questions**

What is the relationship between diet and health?

The article talks about rituals playing a role in health. How might ceremonies impact individual health?

How can paying attention to the ways that we are connected to the environment improve overall health and well-being?

How does the article compare with your previous understanding of how Indigenous people lived before the arrival of Europeans?

Which of these health practices are best suited to the lifestyles that people live today? Which might be harder to maintain?