

HEALTHY BENEFITS OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN FOODS AT KĀ‘ANAPALI BEACH HOTEL

Kā‘anapali Beach, Maui, Hawai‘i – For the employees of Kā‘anapali Beach Hotel, it all began in 1993 with a Hawaiian studies class on the health benefits of the native Hawaiian diet. Since then, the hotel staff has taken full advantage of this knowledge and made the decision to offer this wellness opportunity to its guests. Today, Kā‘anapali Beach Hotel’s Tiki Terrace Restaurant is the only place serving healthy Hawaiian food daily.

“Our Native Hawaiian Combination is a big meal,” says Executive Chef Tom Muromoto, “with no limit to the amount of complex carbohydrates you can eat.” The meal begins with Pohole Fern salad mixed with sweet Maui onion and tomatoes, Hawaiian purple sweet potato, taro, and fresh homemade Maui poi. A ti leaf wrapped laulau (pouch) of steamed chicken or fresh fish with taro leaf is the low fat, low salt, main dish indicative of a pre-contact Hawaiian meal. “I use a sprinkling of ginger, cilantro, shredded seaweed, and green onions for flavoring, which provides a satisfying and delicious alternative to salt,” said Muromoto. “For dessert we serve grilled pineapple and banana slices and a refreshing chilled papaya with lemon.”

The diet became popular following exceptional results of a program launched in 1989 by Dr. Terry Shintani at O‘ahu’s Wai‘anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center. Weight loss was a focus of the ‘Wai‘anae Diet,’ which was initiated to help native Hawaiians (the highest risk group in the nation for diet-related diseases), primarily those suffering from diabetes or at risk for heart disease. Key concepts in the program include traditional Hawaiian foods, adopting a holistic approach to health and wellness, and incorporating a support group that includes participants’ families.

The traditional Hawaiian diet is high in wholesome starches (high-fiber, complex carbohydrates), low in fat and moderate in protein, with only seven percent of the calories derived from fat. Case studies on the 21-day diet program have proven successful, with participants showing amazing results in weight loss (average 17 pounds), diabetic symptoms (eliminating or dramatically reducing the need for daily insulin shots), lowered cholesterol (average 14%) and blood pressure levels. This is remarkable as there is no limitation on the consumption of starches and vegetables prescribed in the diet.

Kā‘anapali Beach Hotel has its own success story. Following the initial training class in 1993, 15 hotel employees requested to undergo a modified diet of native foods for three weeks. “We watched them get thinner and were amazed at how well they began to feel right from the start,” said General Manager, Mike White, who encouraged the hotel’s chef to offer a healthy option for all the employees based on the ingredients and cooking style of the native Hawaiian program.

“We began making our own poi, harvesting mamaki (a medicinal native tea) from the mountains, and sharing with the rest of the staff,” says David Nishimura, a 25-year diabetic and employee of the hotel’s Engineering Department since 1967. Nishimura was able to eliminate the need for daily insulin shots through the program, which was administered under the watchful eye of Maui’s native Hawaiian health organization, Hui No Ke Ola Pono. A Maui native of Japanese descent, Nishimura said, “We all felt proud to learn the Hawaiians’ traditional diet,” a cultural aspect unfamiliar to most prior to the program. Eleven years later, David still makes the poi at Kā‘anapali Beach Hotel, and its fresh taste is renowned by Maui residents.

Following is a recipe for Chef Tom Muromoto's Native Hawaiian Combination, served nightly at the Tiki Terrace Restaurant. The restaurant has been awarded Hawai'i's Kahili Award for excellence in preserving and perpetuating Hawaiian culture.

The results of Dr. Shintani's study are published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, and more can be learned through his guidebook, *The Wai'anae Book of Hawaiian Health*. Hui No Ke Ola Pono is located in Wailuku, Maui and may be reached at 808-244-4647.

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Media Contact: Kurstin Faraone / Chandra Knee
 Murphy O'Brien, Inc.
 310-453-2539
 kfaraone@murphyobrien.com
 cknee@murphyobrien.com