

Memories and positive associations with food from our childhood connect us to our families, communities, and ethnicities. Ethnic heritage often dictates the kinds of foods that are served in the home, and therefore the kinds of foods that are linked to childhood and family. While North Americans may agree that a warm chocolate chip cookie satisfies their cravings, a person of Greek ethnicity may argue that a honeyed *baklava* pastry is best.

Comfort foods are those foods eaten for emotional reasons. Brian Wansink and Cynthia Sangerman of the Cornell University Food Brand Lab write that foods become comforting for two main reasons: positive memories and expression of identity. Foods in the first category elicit feelings of “safety, love, homecoming, appreciation, control, victory or empowerment” (2000:66). Examples of these types of foods might be a kind of soup routinely served with compassion during bouts of childhood illness or a Thanksgiving turkey. Identity-expressing foods in the second category may include steak as masculine or fermented Kombucha tea for “hipsters.”

Talking with people about their comfort foods reveals a clear connection to items prepared by

family members, especially during childhood. Love for people translates into love for foods made and offered by those people. Foods that represent ethnically diverse family backgrounds may fall into either or both of the categories above: they may be connected to positive memories of family and expression of ethnic identity.

Soup is one dish that many people eat for comfort. Often this is because a parent or other caregiver prepares it when a child is sick. For example, someone from the Philippines may prefer *Sinigang* as their comfort food. *Sinigang* is a meat and vegetable soup in a savory broth flavored with tamarind. Ashkenazi or American Jews may turn to matzoh ball soup, a chicken broth with vegetables and a large breaded dumpling. A Japanese college student may crave miso soup with tofu and green onion while away from home.

While all of these examples describe warm, savory meals, the soups are not interchangeable. Comfort foods have a strong connection to personal experience and memory. Sometimes nothing else will do besides mom’s soup, whatever it may be.