

# CELEBRATING FOOD TRADITIONS WITHIN RECOVERY

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**As the holiday season begins, we joyfully embrace the festivities with celebrations and cherished foods. In San Antonio, we are fortunate to be part of a community enriched by a vibrant Hispanic/Latine heritage. This cultural legacy offers the unique joy of sharing traditional dishes with one another. Among these beloved holiday foods, tamales hold a special place as an iconic dish that symbolizes not only culture but also the values of togetherness and connection.**

Tamales have a rich history rooted in tradition. The word tamal comes from the Nahuatl term tamalli, meaning "wrapped." Originally crafted with corn dough and filled with meat, vegetables, and chili, tamales have evolved over time through cultural influences.

Tamales—and Mexican cuisine in general—are often unfairly labeled as unhealthy, largely due to diet culture and misconceptions about certain ingredients like lard. Historically, lard was stigmatized due to its association with the lower class, yet modern research highlights its nutritional benefits. Unlike some vegetable oils, lard is heat-stable and rich in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. Unless specific medical concerns dictate otherwise, it's more beneficial, physically and mentally, to focus on dietary balance rather than singling any one food.

Tamales are not only delicious but also offer a variety of nutritional benefits. They have the three essential macronutrients: carbohydrates, protein, and fat. Additionally, corn as the primary ingredient, is an excellent source of fiber, which supports digestion, enhances satiety, and helps maintain stable blood sugar levels. Tamales are packed with essential vitamins and minerals.

This year marks our second annual tamale-making exposure, where patients not only learn the skill of preparing tamales but also experience the joy and connection that come from this cherished tradition, often shared in Hispanic/Latine households with family members.

At Esperanza EDC, we celebrate the cultural and emotional significance of tamales as part of our philosophy of *Recovery by Doing*. Cooking groups play an important role in eating disorder treatment, and during the holiday season, we provide meaningful exposures tied to real-life events.

We also provide accurate nutrition education that helps challenge common diet culture myths, empowering our patients to overcome misconceptions that may lead them to avoid tamales or other cultural foods. Our dedicated dietary staff and clinicians create a supportive and safe environment, allowing patients to apply therapeutic skills, build lasting memories, and celebrate the holidays with a sense of belonging—and, for some, cultural pride.

Beyond their nutritional value, tamales are a celebration of culture and tradition, offering a flavorful and versatile addition to a balanced diet. Embracing tamales as part of holiday celebrations is about more than enjoying a meal. It is a powerful act of honoring tradition, fostering meaningful connections with loved ones, and celebrating the rich cultural heritage that unites us all.

