

Liver — Aariq

NERCIQUQ AARIMEK. – HE IS GOING TO EAT LIVER.



Photo: Seals off of Cape Alitak, Kodiak Island.

People around the world enjoy eating liver. From liverwurst to fried chicken livers people savor its flavor and texture. Alutiiq people are no exception. Elders report enjoying a variety of wild game liver. They consider seal liver the best, followed by deer liver. Bird livers and fish livers are also delicious and long ago people ate bear liver, often raw. Today, most Alutiiq people panfry liver, serving it with onions. To ensure a pleasant flavor, some soak the organ meat before cooking. A water bath can remove any gamey taste.

Be careful, however, eating too much liver in the Arctic can be risky. Sea mammals store high levels of vitamin A in their livers, a nutrient that can be toxic when consumed in large quantities. Small overdoses of vitamin A make people sleepy, queasy, and irritable. Large overdoses can cause painful peeling skin, coma, and even death. How do Alutiiq people avoid overconsumption? People often share liver, so one person seldom eats very much of this rich food. Traditional stories also remind people to be careful of what they eat.

A legend from Prince William Sound tells of a woman who liked to eat liver. When her husband gave her an odd-looking liver, she refused to eat it. She later discovered that he had killed her sister and harvested the girl's liver! To repay him for his treachery, the woman tricked her husband into falling asleep by a fire. She sang him a dead person's song till he was no longer able to move, and then killed him by throwing his body on the fire!