

## Seal Stomach — Isuwim Suqaa

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### UQUQ ISUWIM SUQANI ETAARTUQ. – OIL IS ALWAYS IN THE SEAL STOMACH.

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Photo: Seal stomach poke from the Alutiiq Museum's collections, gift of the Matfay family.

Although seal meat makes a tasty meal, seals once provided much more than food. In classical Alutiiq society, every part of the animal was used. Skins were fashioned into clothing and boat covers, intestines were sewn into waterproof bags and jackets, strips of sinew from the animal's powerful back were made into thread, seal bladders were shaped into drum coverings, and seal stomachs were made into food containers.

Seal-stomach containers were particularly common household items, and they were used well into the twentieth century. By late fall, the rafters of a typical house were heavily laden with seal stomachs full of summer foods. Berries, greens, oil, fish eggs, and other foods were packaged in these pokes. In addition to storage, such containers were also used to render oil from blubber. Pieces of blubber were stuffed into the stomach and both ends were tightly lashed to prevent it from leaking. As it aged, the blubber would release the oil, which was then used for food, fuel, and waterproofing skins. Conveniently, the dark color of the seal stomach protected the oil from sunlight and its taste-altering effects.