

WHAKAPAPA FRIDAYS – Obesity is like a kererū on berries



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Our tūpuna were scientists. They observed their surroundings and discovered how to take advantage of nature's laws to thrive here in Aotearoa. Our tūpuna learnt how to grow kūmara and store them through the winter, how to build houses, make clothing, create weapons, or treat the sick and wounded. This body of knowledge that was tested and developed over time was passed on through different pūrākau (ancient stories), pakiwaitara (legends), waiata (songs), and a range of other techniques. It was vital to do so to ensure the community had the tools to continue to thrive. Unfortunately, nature's laws are changing.

Since the time of our tūpuna our environment has changed so rapidly that we haven't had the wisdom of time to help guide us. But there are still a few things our tūpuna realised that are still as relevant now as they were back then. In reading a book of Māori proverbs this week I came across this little gem of a proverb;

*“He manu kai kākano e mau, tēnā he manu kai rākau e kore e mau”
“Birds feeding on berries will be caught but not those feeding off trees”*

Our tūpuna understood that when berries were abundant, birds like the kererū and tūi would get fat and lazy – they were an easy catch for the hāngi. But when there weren't so many berries around, these birds became lean, more agile and difficult to snare. The same is true today. We're sounded by so many 'berries' that most of us are ending up like a fat and lazy kererū!

The fast and agile bird is built not on berries but by eating trees or the leaves of trees, this is known as kai rākau in te reo Māori. Similarly, the strong and able Māori warriors were sometimes also called kai rākau, a reference to their diet consisting of the wood like fibrous fern-root.

The lesson here is in order to avoid an early trip to the hāngi pit, intermittent fasting and reducing the 'berries' in your life will help you trim down and dodge that bird's snare! Times of famine help to build resilience and strip unnecessary fat from the body. As we are in the heart of winter and our physical activity takes a bit of a dive, don't be a kererū, stay off the 'berries' and leave your trip to the hangi pit for another day.

Te Miri Rangi