HEART & SOUL CURRICULUM

SESSION 2:

MINDFUL EATING

Food & Nutrition



MINDFUL EATING:
Food & Nutrition

Food and nutrition are a major part of caring for our bodies and supporting our overall wellness. The foods you eat give your body the nutrients and energy it needs to work well and recover each day. Healthy eating does not mean perfect nutrition. It is about eating patterns that support your health and reflect your individual needs, tastes, culture, and access to different foods.

Mindful eating. This means noticing the taste, smell, and feel of food in your mouth, as well as your body's hunger and fullness cues. In the tool, A Healthy Plate, from our Supporting Healthy Weight and Preventing Obesity Guide, we give tips and resources for eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, and lean proteins. You can support healthy eating also by limiting foods high in added sugar, saturated fats, and sodium.

Cultural traditions. Culture also plays a big role in how we feel about food. The foods we eat can reflect our traditions, celebrations, and family history. For this reason, nutrition advice should treat culture as a key part of food choices and not shame any culture or tradition. We can respect our community's culture and make healthier choices.

We can continue to choose foods that matter to us by finding ways to prepare familiar dishes and make changes that support our health. This may include adjusting an ingredient amount in a recipe or swapping out certain ingredients. For example, use more fresh or frozen vegetables, or try cooking methods that reduce extra salt, sugar, or fats. Or limit sodas and sugary drinks and opt for water or another low-sugar or unsweetened drink instead. The goal is not to create a "good" or "bad" list of foods, but to build the confidence to make informed choices while keeping the traditions and foods that matter.

Neighborhood conditions. Location also matters in nutrition. In some communities, **food deserts** limit access to healthy, affordable foods, while **food swamps** make fast food more available than healthier choices. The options for transportation, food costs, grocery stores, community gardens, farmers' markets, and different types of restaurants can all influence what choices people can easily make. By naming these realities, it becomes clear that healthy choices depend on both the decisions an individual or community makes and the specific conditions around them.

Faith and food. Food also holds an important place in many faith traditions. Religious texts, including the Bible, Torah, and Quran, speak about food, fasting, feasts, hospitality, and sharing meals with others. Across traditions, food can mean more than nourishment and can support spiritual practice, celebration, kindness, and community. Fellowship meals, repasts, holidays, community events, and other gatherings often bring people together around food.

Faith communities can consider how the foods they provide can support both tradition and health. Congregations can think about how meals, celebrations, and food programs that already bring people together can also expand access to healthier choices.

Planning for health. Planning can help you make nutrition easier in everyday life. Heart & Soul uses the **3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner** as a healthy weekly meal-planning tool. When using it, start your week by identifying three proteins, three fruits or vegetables, two whole grains, and one legume (like beans, peas, or lentils) to use in your meals all week.

The 3-3-2-1 approach is a planning tool, not a nutrition guide. It helps people think ahead about food, consider their budget and tastes, and have an easier time with meal planning.

Check out other examples of meal prep tips and tools in the Healthy Foods section of the Supporting Healthy Weight and Preventing Obesity guide.

You can also plan out your drinks for the week using Rethink Your Drink by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). On most days, drink water and unsweetened beverages; at fellowship or gatherings, limit sodas and sugary drinks. Instead, choose low- or no-sugar options like unsweetened teas and fruit-flavored seltzers.

Interactive Activity

Use the **3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner** to create a simple meal and grocery plan for the week.

Heart & Soul in Action

There are opportunities to move this learning into collective action.

Actions in your faith community:

- Identify one way to use healthier food options in gatherings, events, or existing food programs. (For example, use standard guidelines for menus that offer healthier options, make healthy choices for fellowship meals, or review the foods served at gatherings.)
- Display the Healthy Plate handout in a public space in the ministry or make it available to people in the session.

Advocacy for community health: Use the ACE Your Health Literacy Toolkit, including the advocacy letter, to fight for healthier food options in your community.



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Session Overview & Learning Goals

Your main goal for this session is to help participants understand how food and nutrition contribute to overall health and identify easy ways to make healthy choices in their everyday lives. Emphasize that healthy eating may reflect individual tastes, culture, budget, food access, and other factors that influence what people can eat.

By the end of this session, the goal is that participants will:

- Identify healthy food choices as part of their regular eating patterns.
- Reflect on how culture, access, and location can affect food and nutrition choices.
- Use the 3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner to create a simple meal and grocery plan.

Facilitator Checklist

Before the session:

- ☐ Review the Mindful Eating session content and facilitator guide.
- ☐ Think about food access issues that may affect members of your congregation or community.
- ☐ Print the 3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner.
- ☐ Share the session announcement with your congregation ahead of time.

Discussion Questions

During the session, you might ask:

- What does healthy eating mean to you?
- How have your family, culture, or traditions shaped your relationship with food?
- What factors influence the foods you and your family eat?
- What can make healthy choices easier? More difficult?
- How might planning help you make food choices that support your health?
- How can your faith community make healthy options easier while honoring cultural and community traditions?

Interactive Activity

Ask participants to use the **3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner** to identify 3 proteins, 3 fruits or vegetables, 2 whole grains, and 1 legume (like beans, peas, or lentils) they can use during the upcoming week. Participants can use their selections to plan meals and their grocery list.

Remind participants that 3-3-2-1 is a planning tool based on common food groups. Encourage them to choose foods that are easier to find, fit their tastes and budget, and can be used in multiple ways throughout the week. Add information about the CDC's Rethink Your Drink to help participants create balanced meals and understand hydration.

Heart & Soul in Action

Let participants know that there are opportunities for this group and faith community to move into deeper learning, personal growth, and collective action on these health topics. Point out the recommended **action steps** to take in the faith community and the tools for further learning and **community advocacy** to review and consider.

- Identify one way to use healthier food options in gatherings, events, or existing food programs.
- Display the Healthy Plate handout and use the ACE Your Health Literacy Toolkit advocacy letter.

Communication Templates

For a Bulletin/Flyer

Mindful Eating: Food and Nutrition
Join us for our next Heart & Soul session as we explore how food and nutrition support our health and well-being. Together, we'll discuss healthy choices, culture, food access, and simple ways to make healthy eating easier while respecting the foods and traditions that matter to us.

[add date, time, location]

For a Weekly Email

This week, Heart & Soul is hosting **Mindful Eating: Food & Nutrition**. Together, we'll discuss how our food choices support our overall health and how culture, access, and community can shape our relationship with food.

We'll also introduce the 3-3-2-1 Simple Meal Planner, a tool that makes healthy meal planning and grocery shopping easier while helping you choose foods that fit your tastes, budget, and life.

[add date, time, location]

MINDFUL EATING: FOOD & NUTRITION

3-3-2-1 SIMPLE MEAL PLANNER

Keep it simple. Choose foods that are accessible to you, fit your tastes and budget, and can be used in different ways throughout the week.

Use This Easy Weekly Planning Formula: 3–3–2–1

For the week, choose 3 proteins, 3 fruits or vegetables, 2 starches or whole grains, and 1 legume such as beans, peas, or lentils. Add dairy or dairy substitutes based on what you like and need. This is a meal-planning strategy, not a serving guide.

A meal plan does not have to cover every day of the week. To make it easier to stick with, start with a few days or weekdays only and give yourself some flexibility on other days.

Category	Examples	My Choices This Week
3 Proteins	Chicken, fish, tofu, eggs, lean beef, turkey, nuts	**1.** _____ **2.** _____ **3.**
3 Fruits or Vegetables	Greens, broccoli, carrots, peppers, berries, apples, oranges	**1.** _____ **2.** _____ **3.**
2 Whole Grains	Brown rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, oats, whole-grain pasta	**1.** _____ **2.**
1 Legume	Black beans, chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans, peas	**1.**

Monday–Friday Meal Plan

Day	Protein(s)	Grain(s)	Fruit(s)Vegetable(s)	Legume(s)
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

My food and nutrition goal for this week: