



Healthy Eating in Places of Worship

SNAPSHOT

The Healthy Eating Program at your place of worship promotes communal meals to include:

1. At least one fresh fruit choice
2. At least one leafy green salad or fresh vegetable
3. At least one whole grain option
4. Water (available during meal time at no cost)
5. A low-fat or non-fat dairy option
6. Low-sodium dressings and condiments

Your place of worship may decide to start to offer one nutrition strategy at a time or may plan to include all nutrition strategies during communal meals

KEY STEPS

1. Define the problem:

Despite existing local policies and programs designed to improve uncontrolled HBP and poor nutrition, current community needs assessment findings showed AA subgroups in NY/NJ have high rates of uncontrolled HBP and poor nutrition.

Interested in learning about the heart health status of people in your community? You may want to ask your local place of worship how they participated in (carried out) a local community needs assessment! Please see examples of a community needs assessment conducted by NYU CSAAH and local partners here: <https://med.nyu.edu/asian-health/research/community-health-resources-needs-assessment>

2. Find the right partners:

If you are a member and/or leader at your place of worship, you are in an ideal position to start and sustain a healthy eating program for your congregation. You are familiar with your organization's structure and may already have some volunteers in mind to help you kick-off the program!

If you are not a part of the faith community site, but want to be involved in starting a healthy eating program at a local place of worship, you will need to devote time to outreach to the members and leaders at the place of worship prior to running the healthy eating program.

All may consider these factors when working with places of worship for a healthy eating program:

- i. **Remain flexible:** If you want to implement a healthy eating program at a local place of worship, remember to be flexible. Consider the existing and changing schedules and priorities of the congregation's leadership or even the staff dynamics of the place of worship. You will need to understand these and be respectful of their time and existing schedules in order to gain their support to carry out the program

- ii. **Outreach consistently:** Review the place of worship’s expectation(s) of the healthy eating program in terms of time, space, volunteer availability, kitchen equipment, food ingredients, food procurement needed to achieve selected nutrition strategies
- iii. **Communicate frequently:** Make time to engage in communication and education activities to raise awareness of healthy eating and educate your community about the health impacts of HBP.

How can a Healthy Eating program benefit the place of worship & community?

- Provide free health education resources & tools to start a Healthy Eating program or support existing community nutrition efforts at the place of worship.
- Increase congregants and community members’ awareness of heart health issues in a comfortable setting (at their place of worship), who may be unaware of HBP and its health impacts.
- Connecting and fostering interactions between a local faith community to other community neighbors who may want to participate in healthy eating initiatives hosted at the place of worship.

3. How to implement the program:

After you’ve reviewed the list of nutrition strategies (shown above under “Snapshot”) listed to incorporate into communal meals, you may want to adapt nutrition strategies that work best with how your place of worship serves communal meals. You may need to take into consideration whether your place of worship has a functioning kitchen and volunteer staff, if your meals are catered from local restaurants or if your communal meals are based on congregant member donations. For specific case studies, please see examples listed below:

Unique Challenges to Implement the Healthy Eating Program at Places of Worship		
You may encounter these challenges at a...	Challenge(s)	Best Practice(s)
Mosque	“During Ramadan, we want to stick to traditional foods”	Health education sessions paired with introducing healthy options during religious holidays such as Ramadan helps build awareness around healthy eating.
Church	“We like our celebration foods” “The kitchen staff has a set way of doing things”	Work with health committees to build awareness around healthy eating. Work with kitchen staff and the team leader to determine what nutrition strategies will work with existing food preparation practices and what nutrition strategies can eventually be implemented with health education opportunities with volunteers and congregants.
Gurdwara	“Our food is donated so we can’t control	Work with committee members to discuss a donation list sheet for gurdwara members and share the importance of

what types of ingredients/food will be available”

healthy eating and how other organizations have kick started the Healthy Eating program and how positive outcomes have impacted other communities

Regardless of your different approaches to implement the Healthy Eating program, health education is a crucial component to bring awareness about the program and for congregants and volunteers to understand the relationship between healthy eating and blood pressure. These materials may be used as an education tool and/or for personal use.

Health Promotion Materials	Print form	Topics	Try it at your place of worship
Read food labels [Bangla, English, Korean,	1 page-information sheet	Sodium levels, nutrition facts	<i>Read food labels and calculate sodium levels of commonly used ingredients in your place of worship's kitchen</i>
Action Plan worksheet	1 page – checklist	Blood pressure, exercise, nutrition, emotional support	<i>Check off your personal goals on this 1 page sheet</i>
Healthy Lifestyle Guide	Guide book	Healthy eating, physical activity, and blood pressure information for you & the whole family	<i>Use this booklet during a nutrition education session at your place of worship</i>
Healthy Meals Plate Planner	1 page	Food portion sizes	<i>Use this plate planner to discuss food groups and portion sizes at a family meal</i>
Healthy Heart Poster	Poster	Healthy Food groups highlighted	<i>Hang up by the kitchen or cafeteria area at your place of worship</i>
Key Steps for Healthy Heart Poster	Poster	Blood pressure, Reducing salt intake, Healthy eating	<i>Hang up in common areas at your place of worship</i>

4. Get the word out:

It is important to develop education activities to promote keeping a healthy diet to help control high blood pressure and build awareness of the nutrition strategies, especially to cultivate buy-in from congregants who may not be involved or aware of the Healthy Eating program activities or interested in healthy eating.

You can foster ongoing advertising/marketing activities such as advertising healthy options at communal meals through newsletters, listserv, announcements, and posts on social media channels relevant for your place of worship. Religious leaders may also incorporate health and nutrition messages in prayer/sermons,



etc. The Healthy Eating volunteer team can also create banners, flyers, palm cards, and put up health promotion materials provided by the REACH FAR Project.

Community members play a key role in planning and sustaining a program like the Healthy Eating program. If you decide to collect evaluation results, please remember to share your findings and results with the place of worship. Evaluation results can be summarized in simple 1 page reports that are circulated to congregants; or even discussed in further detail during administrative meetings with faith leaders and members.

Example of a REACH FAR Double-sided 1 page Nutrition Evaluation summary for community members [Bangladeshi, Asian Indian..]: [\(link\)](#)

5. Things to Consider

Below are some best practices for implementing a healthy eating program in places of worship. This collection summarizes feedback from REACH FAR Project community partners who worked closely with 12 diverse places of worship to implement the Healthy Eating program:

Challenges & Best Practices Encountered During Implementation of the Healthy Eating Program at Places of Worship	
<u>Challenge(s)</u>	<u>Solution(s)</u>
<p>“I don’t think we can start the Healthy Eating program. Our kitchen is being renovated.” –Place of Worship leader</p>	<p>Each place of worship site is different, so it is important recognize the organizational structure and history of how food preparation is conducted at the site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ask these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is food donated? ○ Do you order/cater from local restaurants? ○ Does your place of worship have a kitchen?
<p>“I don’t know how to start this Healthy Eating program at my place of worship” –Healthy Eating Volunteer</p>	<p>Providing/offering complimentary healthy food and beverage samples is an effective way to start the Healthy Eating program, and may be more successful than taking away “bad” food items from communal meals.</p>
<p>“A group of dedicated volunteers prep, cook, and provide meals at our place of worship. I can’t burden them with more responsibilities” –Place of Worship</p>	<p>Focus on encouraging healthy options that work best for the individuals at your place of worship.</p> <p>For example: Offering a whole grain option at the communal meals may be more feasible for your place of worship if</p>



leader	families already donate rice once a month or on a rotational basis and there is no extra burden on the FBO's food budget
“Now that we’ve had the Healthy Eating program at our place of worship for a few months, what else can I do?” -Healthy Eating Volunteer	Include signage of healthy options and distribution of education materials. Highlighting success of the Healthy Eating program in local media or faith-based communication pieces is helpful to raise awareness among congregants.
Why are the meals changing? I liked the way things were” -Congregant	Not everyone may welcome the healthy eating program because it may change existing or traditional practices, such as food preparation, ingredient purchasing, or decision-making. Educating and training key leaders at a place of worship, kitchen staff, and providing health education to congregants will all help with program acceptance within the congregation.
“The Healthy Eating Volunteer team is doing such a great job and congregants have started to accept the program. More people want to see what else we can do. Are there ways we can expand or get more help?” -Place of Worship leader	Invite other interested people & groups to the discussion: educational institutions, media outlets, community groups, etc.