



FOOD & FUN HOUR: PRACTICING FOOD IS MEDICINE

Meeting #9

February 19, 2026

4-5 pm

INTRODUCTIONS

First name & pronouns



**What do you reach for
when you're needing a
pep in your step?**



STINGING NETTLES

Urtica dioica



Native American Foodways: Reciprocity and Healing

- Focused on the transformative, interconnected systems of nature and relatives on all levels
 - Sharing of knowledge and life in food—idea of "life force"
 - Spiritually, physically, emotionally, communally
 - Healing and connected through every stage of the ingredient

"Plants know how to make food and medicine from light and water, and then they give it away."

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of the Plants by [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

Meal composition is dependent on region, season, ceremony, and tradition

Native plant spotlights: stinging nettles, bee balm, sochan (cone flowers)

Creating a Nutrient-Dense Menu Using Foods Consumed by Native Communities in the Northern Great Plains Prior to 1851 for Use in Dietary Intervention Trial

USDA-ARS Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center, Grand Forks, ND, United States.

University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, United States.

United Tribes Technical College, Bismarck, ND, United States.

Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, ND, United States.

Dive Deeper

- [Traditional Foods as Medicine: Exploring the Possibilities](#) from Native Connections Program at Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- [Restoring Health for a Healthy Future Webinar Series](#) from Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA)



[Food as Medicine: Indigenous Knowledge Webinar](#) from 2020 UMN Native American Nutrition

- [North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems \(NATIFS\) Test Kitchen Videos](#)
- [NATIFS Recipes](#)

Nordic Diet

The Nordic Diet is known as a sustainable, plant-based eating pattern from Scandinavia that focuses on local and seasonal foods.

Core Components:

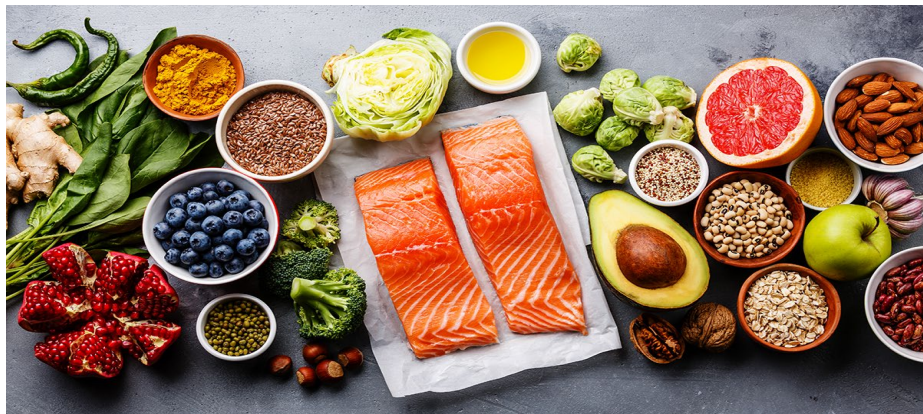
- **Produce:** Berries are a large part of this diet as well as root vegetables and cruciferous veggies like cabbage, kale, and broccoli
- **Protein:** Fatty fish is prioritized alongside lean meats like reindeer and beans
- **Whole Grains:** Rye, barley, and oats are staples.
- **Fats:** Canola oil is the primary cooking fat.
- **Dairy:** Low-fat dairy, especially, like skyr (Icelandic yogurt)

Key Principles:

- **Sustainability:** To reduce environmental impact, this diet focused on local, Nordic-sourced ingredients.
- **Health:** This diet has been associated with a reduced risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes as well as improved inflammation levels in general.
- **Flexibility:** Rather than a restrictive diet plan, the Nordic Diet is considered a lifestyle, focused on the overall quality of food and holistic wellbeing of humans and the earth.

Diving Deeper into the Nordic Diet

While the Nordic Diet and Mediterranean Diet are often compared given their sustainability and shown health benefits, there are regional differences in the core components of these diets as they are both locally-focused. While the Nordic Diet emphasizes canola oil, root veggies, berries, and fermented dairy given its Northern European roots, the Mediterranean Diet prioritizes olive oil, tomatoes, and nuts given its Southern European roots.



Further Research:

- [ResearchGate Nordic Diet Articles](#)
- [Harvard Health](#)
- [The New York Times \(can read for free\)](#)
- [Sustainable Food Systems Transitions](#)

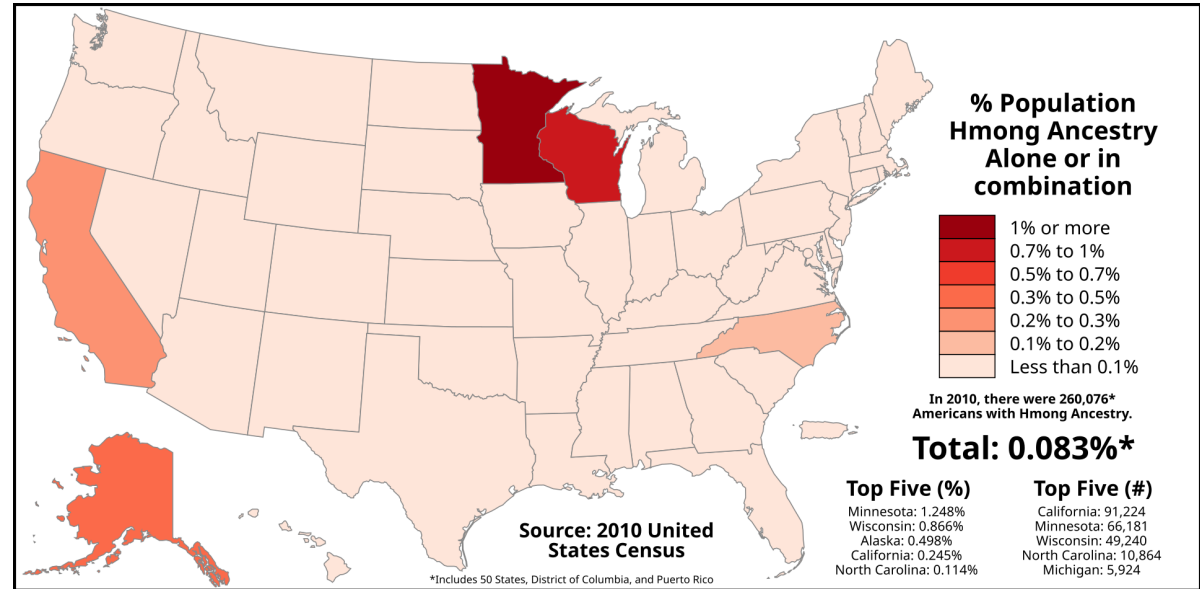


Hmong People

Brief modern history:

- Originated and lived autonomously in the remote highlands of China
- Early- to mid-19th century: Due to intensifying political conflict with Imperial China, they migrated into mountainous regions of SE Asia such as Laos, Thailand, Burma, and Vietnam.
- Many Hmong risked their lives to aid U.S. in the Vietnam War. Afterward, Hmong people faced massive retaliation from communist Lao's People Party.
- In 1975, over half the Hmong fled from Laos to Thailand; many died during that journey.
- In Thailand, lived in refugee camps while awaiting immigration to foster countries.

Sources: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/culture/hmong.pdf>
<https://uwm.edu/news/hmong-history-refugees-and-immigration/>



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong_Americans

Of some 170,000 Hmong displaced to the Western hemisphere in the post-Vietnam War era. About 145,000 of those Hmong refugees found a home in the U.S., while other Hmong communities landed in France, Canada, Argentina and French Guiana in South America.

Hmong Food Traditions

For the Hmong, farming always has been integral to their way of life. Hmong farmers make up more than half of all farmers throughout the Twin Cities metro area farmers markets.

In Hmong cuisine, rice is a staple: sweet rice, purple rice, sticky rice. Many dishes use rice noodles.

Common meal ingredients include foods which they have grown, such as a variety of leafy greens, ginger, vegetables, small amounts of meat (from game or livestock) or fish, and occasional fruits and sweets.

Hmong traditions include the use of healers and herbalism to treat or cure ailments. Hmong spirituality centers around animism, which is a religious belief that objects, places and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. A person's state of health or wellbeing may affect their food choices.



Photos: <https://chawjcreations.com/>

Hmong Traditions After Childbirth

The Hmong postpartum ritual has been passed down for centuries. Because the first 30 days after birth are considered a vulnerable time for new mothers, there are several practices in place to make sure the new mothers regain strength and avoid poor health effects. It is believed that chronic health problems would be the result of not following these practices.

- Consuming Hmong postpartum (chicken) diet for 30 days after childbirth which consists mainly of white rice and boiled chicken with special Hmong herbs. Each special Hmong herb – “tshuaj,” which translates as medicine – has a different purpose in healing the body and can be adjusted according to each new mother’s taste and preference. Eggs can be substituted for chicken if the egg is cooked in an egg drop soup style.
- Drinking warm or hot water is the main beverage during this post-partum period as it is believed that drinking cold water will cause blood to congeal in the postpartum body.
- Resting and avoiding heavy lifting and walking, until the body is healed, and energy regained. Close family members such as in-laws or husband will take on household tasks.
- Keeping covered with warm clothes, especially wearing a knit hat or a wrap around the head to avoid easily catching a cold or headache.
- Restraining from visiting other’s homes for 30 days, especially for the newborn, as not to disrupt, bring unwanted health or spiritual problems to a household.

Sources: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/culture/hmong.pdf>

Photo: <https://chawjcreations.com/>



Ayurveda & Nutrition

Ayurveda is a natural, holistic system of medicine with historical roots in the Indian subcontinent, considered the world's oldest healing system by many scholars.

*It is heavily practiced throughout **India and Nepal**, where as much as 80% of the population reports using Ayurveda. It is used to **treat illness** as well as **promote overall wellbeing**.*

*Overall, Ayurveda is **focused on reaching balance and holistic health** across mind, body, and spirit.*

Nutrition features prominently in Ayurveda. The Ayurvedic diet encourages wellness by aligning food intake with each person's unique metabolic type, or **dosha** (Vata, Pitta, or Kapha).

Another component of the Ayurvedic diet is that meals should ideally feature all six tastes, or **rasas**—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent—to prevent cravings and maintain balance. This is often achieved through the robust and intentional use of spices like turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom.

Ayurvedic nutrition is also based around the thought that energy is imbued into food by whomever cooked, grew, delivered, or otherwise prepared it, further emphasizing the importance of holistic wellbeing. Similarly, the energy and mindset one brings to eating directly impacts the ability to properly digest food.

vata diet

Foods for VATA are grounding, building, easy-to-digest, nourishing, moist and warming.

the vata plate



- carbohydrates whole grains i.e. cooked cereals, pasta, bread, chappatis, oats, wheat, rice
- protein split lentils, tofu, mung beans, lightly roasted nuts
- vegetables preferably lightly cooked,
- fruits fresh and sweeter preferable, steamed/baked fruits
- dairy in moderate quantities; butter, buttermilk, kefir, milk (preferably warm), sour cream, yogurt (fresh)

the vata taste palette



- Vata is balanced by sweet, sour and salty tastes; and is irritated by pungent, bitter and astringent tastes

General rule - Vata foods must not be light, dry, crunchy, cold, raw and anything hard-to-digest or gas-producing.

pitta diet

Foods for PITTA are grounding, sustaining, cooling, calming, heavy and dry.

the pitta plate



- carbohydrates whole grains i.e. whole-wheat breads and cooked grains, basmati, white basmati rice, oats, quinoa, pasta
- protein black lentils, chickpeas, mung beans, soy products
- vegetables most veggies, squashes, potatoes, peas
- fruits sweet & ripe, avoid sour fruits
- dairy in small quantities; unsalted butter, cottage cheese, cream cheese, ghee, milk

the pitta taste palette



- Pitta is balanced by sweet, bitter and astringent tastes; and is irritated by sour, salty and pungent tastes.

General rule - Pitta foods must not be salty, sour & pungent. Avoid hot spices, fried foods, sour drinks (alcohol, coffee, soda) & refined sugars.

kapha diet

Foods for KAPHA are light, dry, well-spiced, warm, easy-to-digest, lively & energising.

the kapha plate



- carbohydrates whole grains i.e. crackers, dry cereals, cooked grains, toasts, amaranth, barley, basmati rice, buckwheat, corn
- protein all legumes & lentils, tofu, soy milk, split peas
- vegetables almost all; raw during summer & cooked rest of year
- fruits dried and astringent fruits are typically best
- dairy in minimal quantities; goat milk, skim milk, soy milk

the kapha taste palette



- Kapha is balanced by pungent, bitter and astringent tastes; and is irritated by sweet, sour and salty tastes.

General rule - Kapha foods must not be heavy, oily & cold. Reduce sweet, salty and sour foods. Avoid fried foods, deserts, sweets, icecream.

Key Traits of Each Dosha:

Vata (Air): Light-framed, quick-moving, and creative but prone to dry skin, anxiety, and coldness

Pitta (Fire): Medium build, intelligent, driven, and intense with warm skin and a strong metabolism

Kapha (Earth): Solidly built, calm, methodical with thick skin and slow, steady energy

According to Ayurveda, eating according to your dosha enhances digestion, boosts immunity, increases energy, and promotes long-term and holistic health.

Final Notes on Ayurvedic Nutrition

In contrast to other diets that focus solely on calorie intake or macronutrients, an Ayurvedic diet considers an individual's dosha and how different foods impact overall balance, especially as the seasons change. This personalized and responsive approach aims to promote holistic health.

Resources for Further Learning:

- [Interview with Nalini Mehta](#)
- [Nalini Mehta's The Happy Chef Project](#)
- [Ayurvedic Cooking Overview](#)
- [Deeper Look into Ayurveda](#)
- [Nidhi Bhanshali Pandya](#)

TASTE	EFFECT	BALANCES DOSHA	FOUND IN...
Sweet	Nourishing, grounding, cooling	Vata, Pitta	Grains, dairy, fruits, root veggies
Sour	Stimulates digestion, warms	Vata	Lemon, yogurt, fermented foods
Salty	Hydrating, softening, warming	Vata	Sea salt, seaweed, mineral salts
Bitter	Detoxifying, cooling, lightening	Pitta, Kapha	Greens, turmeric, dandelion
Pungent	Stimulates metabolism, heats	Kapha, Vata	Chili, ginger, garlic, mustard
Astringent	Absorbs moisture, firms tissueS	Pitta, Kapha	Legumes, cranberries, raw greens



Discussion

- How do we practice intentionality in our own foodways?
- How can these learnings encourage us in our own health journeys?
- So many of our learnings today have been about cultural notions of community and care. In what ways is community its own medicine?
- Any other thoughts to share!



Future Discussion Topics

What would you like to talk about in future meetings?

Any guests you would like to see?

Do any of you have a food topic you'd like to present on?





Contact us!

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If we cannot answer your call live, please leave us a detailed message with your name, date of birth, and what we can assist you with!

If we are having a hard time reaching each other, leave a timeframe that would be best for us to call you back.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING!