

Improving Health Disparities in Minnesota Somali Communities: *Circles of Health*

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About UCare



UCare Mission

UCare will improve the health of our members through innovative services and partnerships across communities

UCare Vision

The leader in providing all members a path to the best health for their lives

UCare History

- University of Minnesota Dept. Family Medicine and Community Health created UCare Minnesota in 1985 in response to a state demonstration project for Medicaid eligible people in the Twin Cities
- Since 1989, an independent, nonprofit health plan
- Lines of business: Medicaid, Medicare, SNPs, individual and family plans
- Two SNPs: (1) UCare's Minnesota Senior Health Options FIDE-SNP (over 13,500 members) for those 65 and over; and (2) UCare Connect + Medicare D-SNP (en route to HIDE-SNP status) (2,778 members) for those 21-64 with disabilities

Somalia History



- Years of conflict, severe drought, and famine have left Somalia in a state of crisis
- Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have been displaced by warfare/immigrated to the US
- Until 1973, Somali had been an unwritten language



Somalis in Minnesota



- At over 52,000, Minnesota has the largest population of people who report Somali ancestry in the US
- Minnesota: Combination of available jobs + a generally welcoming populace, which built on itself, leading to more arrivals
- Two centers: Twin Cities and southern Minnesota (Rochester and Faribault)
- Minnesota now has 24,000 immigrant-owned businesses that generate \$489 million annually



General Definitions of Health



American Health System: Health is often viewed as an “absence of disease”

World Health Organization: “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity”





Somali Definition of (Good) Health

Somali women view health **holistically** and within the context of their daily lives

- Being engaged in productive activities
- Relating well to self, family and Allah/God
- Living in communities that "watch our children and avoid violence"





Somali Definition of (Ill) Health

Ill health is often described as **insomnia and fatigue, spiritual dissonance, social disconnection and sadness.**

“It’s the lifestyle here. There’s more stress. Depressions. Lack of sleep. We are isolated into our own world. All of that is deteriorating our health.”

“In Somalia, we were one nation and we knew each other. Here women are more isolated. We have depression.”



Somali Strengths and Assets

- Strong value on health
- Traditional practices of healthy eating and leading healthy lifestyles
- Traditional foods and medicines are used to prevent and treat illnesses
- Religious and cultural practices order one's daily life
- Somali community members are highly interconnected and frequently gather socially
- Oral traditions for sharing information are prominent
- A culture of sharing is strong and common
- Health is viewed as a balance in relationship among people, between people and nature

Source: *"Cultural Assets of East African Immigrant Communities in the Cedar-Riverside Neighborhood of Minneapolis"*

The Challenge of Accessing Quality Healthcare



- Relocation from one country to another requires extensive adjustment and can result in family and social disruption, as well as altered health
- Acculturation, stress, environmental risks, lifestyle changes
- Difficulty navigating health systems



A Vision of Hope



- UCare continually looks at ways to improve our services to immigrant communities, including the Somali community
- It was clear that the Somali community was not taking full advantage of the healthcare system and experiencing more and more health challenges as a result
- A successful model -- **Somali Circles of Health & Well-Being™** -- has a positive impact on the health of Somali women and their families
- UCare moved forward with funding to support the program's implementation in Rochester and Faribault

Circles of Health Program



An eight week culturally-based program that empowers participants through:

- The support of others
- Shared cooking experiences
- Culturally appropriate exercise
- Nutrition and health education
- A safe, welcoming and healing environment





Program Goals

- To **act as a bridge** between health, education and culture for optimal self-expression and well-being
- To **empower and inspire** women to embrace their capacity to support their own health and well-being -- and that of their families and communities
- To **improve the long-term health** and well-being of refugee and immigrant women and their families



Participants (Over 120 So Far!)



- **Gain the knowledge** needed to maintain health in mind, body and spirit
- **Learn what foods lead to health** versus foods that could lead to illness over time
- **Make informed choices** about their own health and health of their family
- **Improve access** to the healthcare system
- **Feel more confident** when working with their healthcare professionals

8 Culturally-Based Modules



- **A duplicable and holistic approach** to improving the long-term health and well-being of immigrant and refugee women and their families in Minnesota
- **A welcoming, safe and healing environment** created for women to share their health challenges and be heard
- **Deeply grounded in culture**, directly shaped by, and responsive to, the values, needs and concerns of Somali immigrants and refugees
- **Emphasis on process** and building trust and friendships

Tea &
Conversation

Stories &
Reflection

Sharing &
Learning

Cooking &
Laughing

Module 1

Intro and Intake

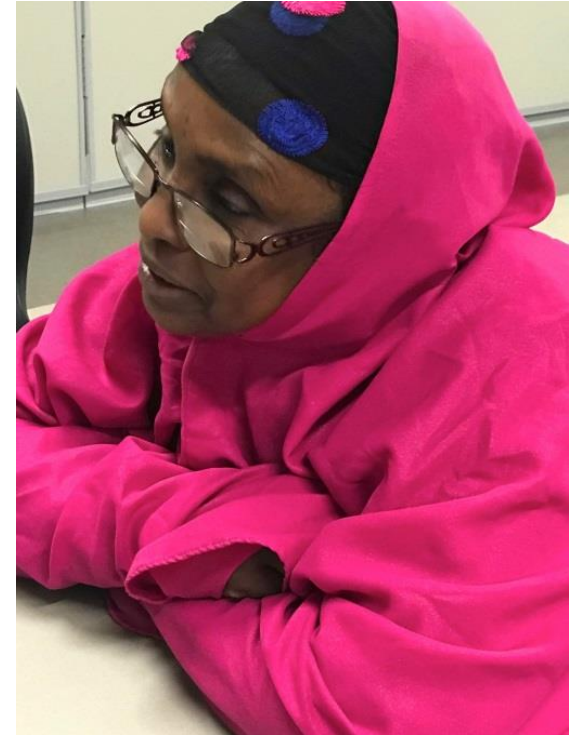


Ignite hope and generate excitement about reclaiming optimal health and well-being
Explore the concept of “Food as Medicine”



Module 1: Intro and Intake

- Conduct pre-health assessments/survey
- Introduce the Circles of Health Program
- Introduce the concept of food as medicine
- Capture baseline health information with intake forms
- Review expectations, holistic approach
- Share health video (*It's Cool to Be Healthy*)



Module 2

Renew, Refresh, Restore



Begin the process of building trust and friendships
Introduce the importance of the breath, of drinking water, of eating fiber and healthy foods

Module 2: Renew, Refresh, Restore



- Discuss the benefits of drinking water
- The importance of breath work
- Discuss the importance of stable blood sugar
- Review healthy breakfast options
- Fiber and constipation



Module 3

Tradition, Culture and Health



Honor cultural health assets and strengths within the Somali community
Listen, trust and value our inner wisdom

Module 3: Tradition, Culture and Health



- How sugar impacts health
- Review strengths and assets that support health and well-being in the Somali community
- What is your definition of health and well-being?
- Encourage participants to voice health concerns



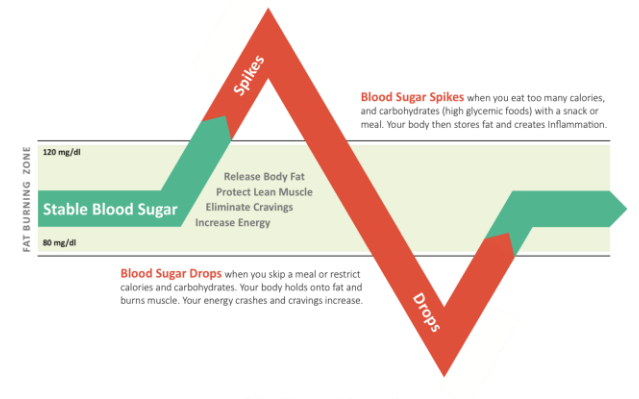
Amina



Mahiya

BLOOD SUGAR CHART

A balanced diet of low & medium glycemic foods keeps you in the fat burning zone



Module 4

Food and Mood



Clarify the connection between food and mood
Share techniques and resources for dealing with stress and trauma

Module 4: Food and Mood



- Understand how the food we eat affects how we feel
- Learn simple techniques to alleviate stress (meditation, breath work)
- Address mood swings, depression, stress, anxiety
- Review what foods lead to health and which cause inflammation, blood sugar spikes, etc.



Module 5

Healthy Food Choices



To be aware of the choices available when making a healthy meal or snack
Learning to incorporate fiber, protein and healthy fats into every meal and snack

Module 5: Healthy Food Choices



- Understand the difference between low and high glycemic foods
- What does “nutrient-dense” mean?
- Introduce the “Healthcare Checklist”



Module 6

Trust Your Gut



Learn how the health of the gut relates to our overall health and well-being



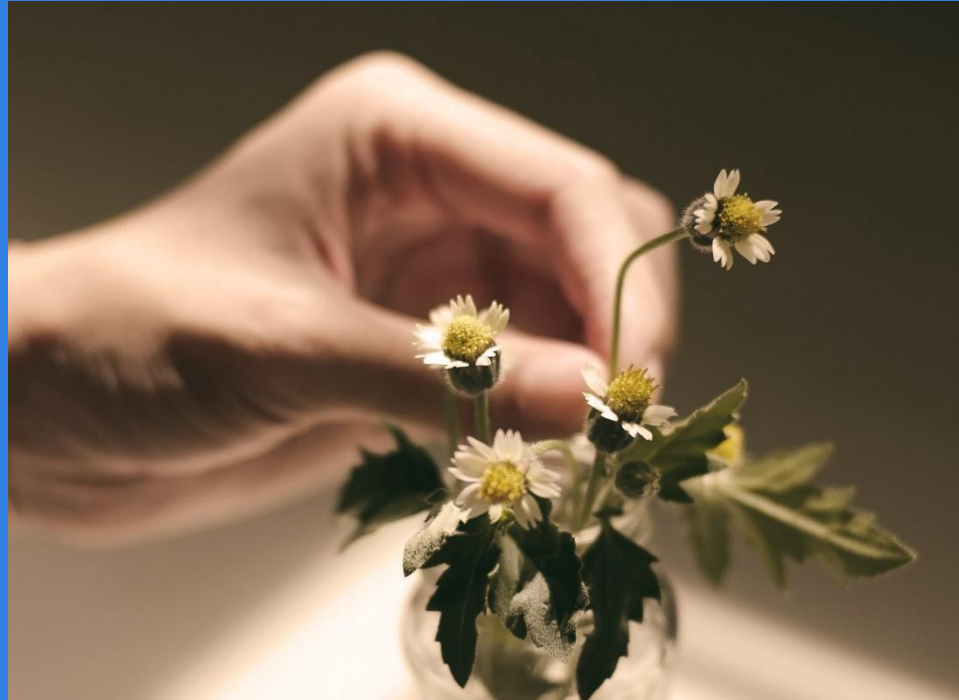
Module 6: Trust Your Gut

- Introduce foods that support a healthy digestion
- The function of fiber; identify fiber-rich foods
- Share stories; give examples of a time when participants were resilient



Module 7

Healthy Tips for Lasting Health

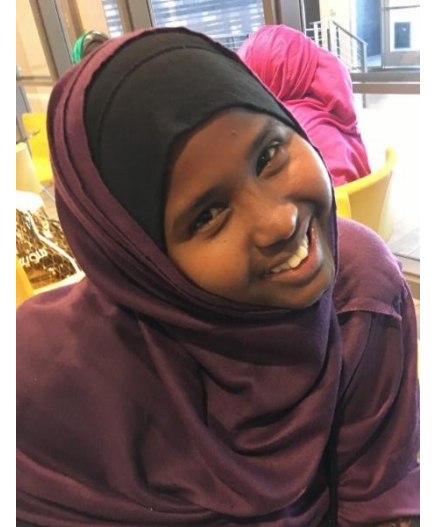


Share simple tools that will empower women to achieve their health goals and take responsibility for their ongoing health and healing

Module 7: Healthy Tips for Lasting Health



- Exercise essentials for optimal health
- Importance of sleep
- Learn how to read labels
- Tips on how to eat on-the-go
- Create ongoing support group through WhatsApp
- Options for exercise (walking, biking, dancing, yoga, gym, videos)
- Share a time when a blessing was hidden within a difficult situation



Module 8: Exit Interviews

Next Steps for a Healthy Future



Review progress while setting goals for the future
Take measurements and record stories

Module 8: Exit Interviews, Celebration



- Review: preventive health - what does it mean?
- Review Healthcare Checklist
- Complete exit forms and survey
- Take measurements and weight
- Review/summarize highlights of the modules
- Certificates and gifts
 - Participants receive weight scales, measuring cups, portion control cups and cutting boards



Program Outcomes



- **Improved overall health and well-being** (lower blood pressure, improved blood sugar levels, less constipation, weight loss, increased energy, improved mood, improved productivity)
- **Fewer trips to the ER**
- **More successful interactions with primary physicians**
- **Families and children are eating healthier foods**
- **Participants support each other in living a healthier lifestyle**
(WhatsApp Support Group for exercise, healthy eating, exchange of ideas and learning, emotional support leading to fewer ER visits)
- **Children support parents in healthy food choices**
- **Women share their success with friends and community**

Coming in 2020



- Expansion of program to Twin Cities
- Train the trainers to continue programs in southern Minnesota
- Work to bring program to other diverse communities



Healthy Tools

- Apron
- Measuring Cups
- Cutting Mat
- Scale
- Portion Plate





Questions?

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