

Food Access Spectrum Activity Directions

Overview: This activity is designed to explore **what** the common barriers to healthy food access are and **how** these circumstances impact people's lives. You will ask participants a series of questions about food access, and they will answer for the character they have been assigned. After you have asked the question, you will tell participants a follow up fact. At the end of the exercise, participants will see how far apart they are from one another. This represents how varied access to healthy food is in the U.S. You will then ask participants to reflect on and share what they have learned.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Number of participants: 4-20 (depends on how much space you have)

What You Will Need:

- A printout of one character description per person
- Enough space for each person to take 20 steps OR paper and a pen for each Team Member

Directions:

- *Hand each person a character as they come in the room or place their character print out under their seat.*
- *Tell participants: "Welcome to the Food Access Spectrum Activity! The goal of this exercise is to explore **what** the common barriers to healthy food access are and **how** these circumstances impact people's lives. You each have been assigned a character. The different characters are reflective of the spectrum of food access people in America face."*
- *"Please take a moment to read your character's description and only the description, not the answers, to familiarize yourself with their circumstances. When you are finished, please stand up and line up in a row in the middle of the room."*
- *"I'm going to ask you a series of questions about your character's access to healthy food. If your character would answer yes to a question, you will take a step forward. If they would answer no, take a step back. If you would like to answer the questions for yourself or with someone else in mind, please feel free to do so."*
 - *Alternative: If you don't have enough space for people to take 20 steps, you can ask participants to bring paper and a pen and have them add 1 if the answer is yes, and subtract 1 if the answer is no. For instance, if they would answer yes to the first question and no to the second, they would be back at 0.*
- *Ask participants each question and then tell them the follow up fact (not all questions have follow up facts).*



Questions

- **Question 1.** Do you have enough money to buy fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis?
 - In 2021, 41 million Americans received SNAP benefits, previously called food stamps. The SNAP program provides monthly benefits to help participants purchase food. ([source](#)).
 - For every one meal provided by food banks in the United States, SNAP provides nine. It has also “been shown to have positive impacts on health and educational outcomes.” ([source](#) & [source](#))
- **Question 2.** Do you have **at least one** of the following:
 - regular access to a car
 - reliable access to public transportation
 - or a grocery store within a 20 min walk that you have street lights and sidewalks to use to get there?
- **Question 3.** Do you have a community garden or farmer's market near your home where you can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables?
- **Question 4.** Are you free of any physical mobility challenges?
 - Whole Cities partners with organizations that run mobile markets that meet people where they are, frequently setting up shop in front of a community clinic, school, or church or even delivering to people’s homes. We also support organizations that supply corner stores with fresh fruits and vegetables, again, bringing access closer to home.
- **Question 5.** Is the produce you find fresh and high quality?
 - At WFM we know quality is a big deal, and that just because a store carries produce, doesn’t mean that it is high quality. According to the USDA “One of the biggest deterrents to [fruit] consumption is poor quality. Storage, shipping, and handling can lead to bruising, browning, rot, and deterioration of texture and flavor, making the fruit unappealing to consumers and causing major losses for the industry.” ([source](#))
- **Question 6.** Do you have a close-knit community and feel welcome when you are shopping at your local food retailer?
 - Even if you can get to a grocery store, if you feel unwelcome or harassed, you may not want to shop there.
- **Question 7.** Were you born in the US?
 - Although some immigrants are eligible for public benefits, they do not always feel safe accessing them. According to a study by the Urban Institute, “13.6% of eligible immigrant adults “reported that they did not enroll in programs like Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and housing subsidies last year because of worries that it would affect their legalization efforts.” ([source](#))
- **Question 8.** Are you familiar with the produce you find AND does it fit with your cultural and religious dietary restrictions?
- **Question 9.** Do you identify as a white and non-Hispanic person?
 - As the NIH states, “The relationship between race/ethnicity, and food insecurity is complex, as it intertwines with other risk factors, such as poverty and unemployment... However, despite the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and other social or economic factors of food insecurity, some studies noted that the higher risk of food insecurity among people of color continues even after the effects of other confounders are removed.” ([source](#))

- According to the USDA, in 2018, Blacks and Hispanic households remained disproportionately affected by food insecurity at a rate of 21.2% and 16.2%, while the national average was 11.1%. ([source](#))
- **Question 10.** Do you know how to cook and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables in healthy and delicious ways?
 - Many of our partners who run urban farms, mobile markets, and community gardens also offer nutrition and healthy cooking classes because they know you have to have access AND information to make healthy eating a reality for many families.

DISCUSSION

- *Say to participants:*
 - Take a moment to look where we started and how spread out we are now.
 - If you had Ava, you got to answer 100% of the questions yes, Miguel 70%, Emily 40%, and Jamal 0%.
 - You can sit down.
 - Often when people talk about food access, they are taking about affordability or proximity, but as you can see from the exercise, there are a whole set of factors that play into someone's ability to feed themselves and their families fresh, healthy food.
 - Please take a moment, to think about the exercise. Did you learn anything new about food access? Does anyone have an example they'd like to share? (*Give participants time to answer*)
 - If you'd like to learn more about food access and the work Whole Foods Market is leading to expand access in the US and Canada, check out wholecitiesfoundation.org where you can find more information about the foundation and how to get involved.

