Eating With the Seasons

A year-round food guide for Middle Tennessee

BIOPHYSICS BEFORE BIOCHEMISTRY

Why the seasons matter

Your body runs on signals. The strongest one is light.

In Middle Tennessee, the shortest days of December give us less than 10 hours of daylight. By late June we get close to 15. For most of human history, the food on the table moved right along with that swing. Summer meant fruit and fresh produce. Winter meant meat, fat, and whatever kept in the cellar.

Grocery stores erased that rhythm. You can buy the same strawberries in January that you buy in June. Your body still reads the season through light, though, and food is a second signal layered on top. When the two tell different stories, the system has to work harder.

This guide puts them back on the same page. Light comes first and food follows. Use it as a map for what to reach for at the market, and what to lean on less, as the year turns.

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

I

Winter

DECEMBER · JANUARY · FEBRUARY

Lowest carbs

II

Spring

MARCH · APRIL · MAY

Carbs rising

III

Summer

JUNE · JULY · AUGUST

Most carbs

IV

Fall

SEPTEMBER · OCTOBER · NOVEMBER

Carbs tapering

Each season gets its own page. Find the one you're in and start there.

What stays the same all year

Some things don't move with the calendar. These are your anchors in every season.

Circadian Whole30 is the base. Everything in this guide sits on top of it. If your care team has you on a different plan, like Circadian Keto, follow that plan and use this guide for your produce and protein choices.

Big protein, early. 50 to 75 grams of protein at your first meal, timed around sunrise.

Protein first, then fat, then carbs. Same plate, better order.

Something fermented at every meal. Sauerkraut, kimchi, salt-brined pickles from the refrigerated section, or kefir and yogurt if dairy works for you.

Local and seasonal before shipped in. Grass-fed and pastured meat, pasture-raised eggs, organic produce. Food grown here was picked recently, under the same sky you live under.

Eat outside when you can. Daylight at the table is free medicine. When you eat indoors under artificial light, especially after sunset, keep that meal lower in carbs.

> YOUR RELIABLE FLOOR
>
> *It doesn't change with the season. Protein at sunrise and something fermented. The produce around it is what moves.*

Finding it locally

The easiest way to eat with the seasons is to shop where only seasonal food is sold.

- **Farmers markets.** Franklin has farmers markets every Saturday, all year. Winter hours are shorter than summer hours, so check before you go.
- **Pick Tennessee Products.** The state's directory at picktnproducts.org lists farms and markets by county, along with a growing-season chart.
- **Ask the farmer.** How are the animals raised? What are they fed? What's coming in next week? Good farmers are happy to tell you.
- **Stock the freezer.** Buy extra at the peak of a season. Summer berries and a fall beef share carry you a long way into winter.

Harvest dates in this guide are typical for Middle Tennessee. Weather moves them by a few weeks in either direction every year.

I DECEMBER · JANUARY · FEBRUARY

Winter

THE SIGNAL

Short days, a low sun, and cold. This is the season for rest and repair.

Winter sunlight is weak. The sun sits low in the sky and carries very little UV, and in our approach, UV is the part of sunlight most tied to how your body handles carbohydrate. So winter is the season for the least sugar and starch of the year. Protein and fat carry the load.

If sweets pull harder this time of year, you're not imagining it. Short days change appetite for a lot of people. That's why having a few anchor meals ready matters most in winter.

PROTEIN	Grass-fed beef, lamb, bison, pastured pork, venison, liver and other organ meats, bone broth. Wild cold-water seafood like oysters, sardines, and salmon.
VEGETABLES	Kale, collards, turnip and mustard greens, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, leeks, onions, turnips, radishes
FATS	Butter or ghee from grass-fed cows, beef tallow, lard, egg yolks, olive oil
CARBS	The smallest portions of the year. Stored sweet potatoes, winter squash, and carrots in modest amounts, mostly at daytime meals.
FRUIT	Mostly out of season here. A stored local apple now and then is fine.
FERMENTED	Sauerkraut, kimchi, fermented carrots or beets

PAIR IT WITH

- Get a little cold. Walk outside in the morning, crack the car window or sunroof, keep the house cooler.
- Keep seeing sunrise, even on gray days. Cloud cover still carries the signal.
- Eat dinner early. Sunset comes before 5 p.m. for much of the season, so that last meal is likely under artificial light. Keep it the lowest-carb meal of your day.
- Ask your care team about a vitamin D lamp if you haven't already.

Some members are moved to a keto approach for the winter. That's an individual call your care team makes with you. If it's you, follow that plan.

II MARCH · APRIL · MAY

Spring

THE SIGNAL

Days getting longer fast. The sun climbs and UV comes back.

Spring food is light, green, and a little bitter. Tender greens and shoots are the first things up, and they're exactly what a body coming out of winter can use.

Carbs can start to come back as the days stretch out. Let them follow the light gradually rather than jumping straight to summer eating in March.

PROTEIN	Pasture-raised eggs (hens lay more as days lengthen), lamb, pastured chicken, beef, local trout
VEGETABLES	Lettuces, spinach, arugula, radishes, spring onions, herbs, kale. Asparagus from late April into May. Sugar snap and English peas in May.
FATS	Butter, ghee, olive oil, egg yolks
CARBS	A gradual step up from winter, mostly from spring fruit and peas
FRUIT	Strawberries from late April into early June
FERMENTED	Fresh sauerkraut, radish kimchi, kefir or yogurt if dairy works for you

PAIR IT WITH

- Move lunch outside as the weather allows. A plate eaten in daylight is a different signal than the same plate at your desk.
- Get your bare feet on the ground once it warms up.
- Watch the time change in March. Sunrise jumps later by an hour, so your first meal shifts with it.

III JUNE · JULY · AUGUST

Summer

THE SIGNAL

The longest days and the highest sun of the year. The most UV you'll get.

This is the season where fruit and starchier vegetables fit best. The light is strongest, you're outside more, and Tennessee farms are at full production. Enjoy it.

Protein still comes first on the plate, and the carbs land best at meals eaten in daylight, ideally outdoors.

PROTEIN	Pastured chicken, beef, and pork off the grill, eggs, local fish
VEGETABLES	Tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini and yellow squash, okra, bell peppers, green beans, eggplant, new potatoes, fresh herbs
FATS	Olive oil, butter, avocado now and then. Meals can run a little lighter on fat than in winter.
CARBS	The most of the year. Fruit and new potatoes at daytime meals.
FRUIT	Blueberries, blackberries, peaches, watermelon, cantaloupe
FERMENTED	Fermented cucumber pickles, fermented salsa, kefir if dairy works for you

PAIR IT WITH

- Eat outside as often as you can. Breakfast on the porch counts.
- Get midday sun in sensible doses. Build up slowly and cover up before you burn.
- Replace what you sweat. Water with a pinch of good salt, or a mineral-rich electrolyte, on hot days.
- Keep evenings dim even though sunset comes late. Long days make it easy to stay up under screens.

IV SEPTEMBER · OCTOBER · NOVEMBER

Fall

THE SIGNAL

Days getting shorter and the sun sitting lower. Harvest time.

Fall is a little tricky. The harvest is full of sweet, starchy food at the same time the light is fading. In nature, that's how animals put on fat for winter. Most of us don't need to.

So enjoy the early fall harvest, then let portions of the sweet and starchy foods shrink as November arrives and the days close in.

PROTEIN	Grass-fed beef (fall is a great time to buy a quarter or half share for the freezer), pastured pork, lamb, venison, organ meats, bone broth
VEGETABLES	Fall greens return: kale, collards, turnip greens. Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, beets, carrots, turnips.
FATS	Shift back toward heavier fats: tallow, lard, butter, ghee. Pecans and walnuts.
CARBS	Generous in September, tapering through November. Sweet potatoes, butternut and acorn squash, pumpkin.
FRUIT	Muscadines in early fall, apples, pears, persimmons
FERMENTED	Fresh-cabbage sauerkraut and kimchi. Fall is the best time of year to make a batch.

PAIR IT WITH

- Follow sunrise as it gets later. Your first meal moves with it.
- Move dinner earlier after the time change in November, when sunset comes an hour earlier.
- Start getting comfortable with cooler mornings outside before winter arrives.

Using this guide with your care team

This guide covers food choices across the year. Your framework and how much protein, fat, and carbohydrate you eat are decided with the care team at The Cabell Clinic based on your labs, your goals, and how you're responding. If you have specific instructions from us, those come first.

Bring questions to your next session. Seasonal shifts are a normal part of the conversation.