Giving the GIFT OF FOOD

A Shopper's Guide to Sharing with Hungry Neighbors

Thank You for caring about your hungry neighbors!

The food you share through the Food Project is always a gift—an expression of love and concern for people you'll probably never meet. And you don't need wrapping paper or ribbons!

Of course, any food you share is appreciated…but you want your gift to be something that's needed and useful. And so do we. That's why the *Neighborhood Food Project* created this booklet. It provides information to help you choose nonperishable food that really improves people's lives.

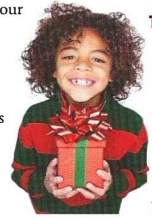
You care enough to help; we'll help you make the most of the effort. Together, we can build a stronger community.

Your friends at the *Neighborhood Food Project.*

The Joy of Giving

We all know the wonderful feeling that comes with giving a gift. Here are 3 tips to help you experience that feeling when you're shopping for your neighbors.

Think of it as "sharing food" instead of "helping the needy." Scientists say that when we share, our brains release a hormone called *oxytocin*, which enhances trust and "contributes to our sense of well-being and happiness."



Experience it as a generous act. A 2003 study at the University of Michigan showed that generosity "reduces stress, supports our immune system, promotes longevity, and enhances our sense of purpose."

Think of yourself as a volunteer. You really are — you're volunteering time and money to help your neighbors. A study by Harvard University found that people who volunteered were "42% more likely to be happy than those who didn't." It's called "helper's high."

The Gift of Health

When you share food with hungry neighbors, you have an impact on their health—for better or worse. Clients of food banks often lack the resources for a balanced nutritional diet, so they tend to have alarmingly high rates of:

High Blood Pressure

Also called *hypertension*, it's a risk factor for heart failure and *atherosclerosis*. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of Americans have it, but nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of food bank clients do.

Can be caused by eating too much salt (sodium).

High Cholesterol

A major risk factor for coronary heart disease. About 12% of Americans have it, but 45% of food bank clients do.

Can be caused by eating saturated fat and trans fats.

Type 2 Diabetes

Over time, diabetes can cause major damage—from blindness to stroke. Less than 10% of Americans have it, but over 20% of food bank clients do.

Seriously impacted by high-calorie and sugary foods.

Obesity

More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of food bank clients suffer from it because the cheapest food is also the highest-calorie and least nutritious. It's a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease, cancer and much more.

Can be caused by eating too many high-calorie foods.

Food Bank Facts

Millions of Americans need help with food every month. And when they find themselves in need, a local food bank or food pantry is one of the few places they can go.

1 Most food pantries are small, local nonprofits.

They are *not* official government agencies. They're staffed by volunteers who are part of the community and work directly with your hungry neighbors.

2 They only provide emergency supplies.

They aren't a day-to-day source of food. They usually only offer clients a 2-3 day supply of food—often just once a month.

3 Their food comes from many sources.

They get it from manufacturers, government, grocery stores, farmers…and people like you. Your food donations are usually distributed within 30 days.

4 Food pantries are a vital community resource.

They're the last line of defense against hunger in America. When someone needs food *right now*—today—and has no other way of getting it, the food bank is there.

The "House Rules"

Here are a few things food banks want you to know before you donate nonperishable food.

1 No badly dented, unlabeled, or rusty cans. Food banks need to know what's in a can and how old it is. A damaged can might contain *botulism*, a deadly food poisoning.

3 No home-made food or opened items. Your homemade pickles are terrific…but the food bank can't accept them.

2 Avoid expired food. Want to donate food from your pantry? Look at the expiration date stamped on the package. If the date has passed, check with your food bank to see if they still want it.

4 Bulk food is welcome if the package is unopened. It's a great value; food banks will split the package into many servings. But again, food safety is the issue.

SHOPPING FOR HEALTHY NONPERISHABLE FOOD

Nonperishable food—which can be stored without refrigeration—is a staple of food banks. You might think it's less nutritious than fresh food, but it can be very healthy. You just have to know what to look for.

Healthy Nonperishables

Fiber for Breakfast

"My kids all want cereal for breakfast, but it's so expensive that the only way I can afford it is to get it at the food bank." —TT

Your Gift: Breakfast cereal

Why They Need It: For food bank clients, especially kids, cereal is a special treat. And a good breakfast is critical to ensure that kids are ready to learn at school.

- The healthiest cereals are *whole grain*. They're full of vitamins, minerals, and all-important fiber—which helps kids feel full longer.

Smart Shopping

- Read the label. "100% whole grain" should be be the first item listed.
- If the box says "whole grain," at least half the grain ingredients are whole. If it says "100%," they all are.
- Check the sugar content: Cereal with less than 6 grams of sugar per serving is recommended.

Protein in a Can

"I'm so grateful when we have some meat or fish for dinner or sandwiches. It makes such a difference!" —J.W.

Your Gift: Canned Chicken & Fish

- Tuna, wild salmon, mackeral, sardines.

Why They Need It: Protein is essential for good health, but it is often missing from low-income diets. Fish and chicken are a great low-fat source.

- Fish is also high in omega 3 fatty oils, which reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Smart Shopping

- Look for *low sodium* on the label.
- Tuna is popular. Packed in water, it contains less calories than in oil.
- Tuna packed in extra-virgin olive oil or sunflower oil is also a healthy choice.
- Wild salmon is generally considered the healthiest canned fish.

Go Nuts!

"I can't imagine my family without peanut butter. It's healthy, and the kids love it. It's a lifesaver!" —D.T.

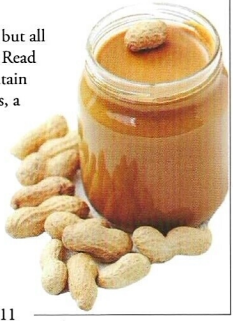
Your Gift: Peanut butter and other nut butters / Nuts

Why They Need It: Nuts and nut butters are great sources of fiber and protein. They're high in vitamins, minerals, and heart-healthy oils.

- Walnuts are especially high in omega-3 fats.

Smart Shopping

- Peanut butter is popular, but all peanut butter is not equal. Read the label: Some brands contain hydrogenated vegetable oils, a source of trans fat. Some contain excessive sugar.
- Pick the peanut butter with the fewest extra ingredients.
- The healthiest is just peanuts and salt.



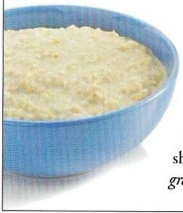
Oat Cuisine

"I always take oatmeal when it's available. Hot oatmeal in the morning makes me feel full and ready to work." —T.W.

Your Gift: Steel-cut or rolled oats. Rolled oats are what people commonly think of as oatmeal.

Why They Need It: You can't beat oatmeal for nutrition. Oats are low in calories but high in fiber and protein. They're also a rich source of minerals.

- Oatmeal can lower the risk for high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. It can even lower cholesterol levels—especially "bad" (LDL) cholesterol.



Smart Shopping:

- Generally, the less processed oats are, the better they are for you.
- Instant oatmeal is convenient, but may be high in sodium and sugar, and lower in fiber.
- For best nutrition, the package should list one ingredient: *whole grain oats.*

Yes, It's Real Fruit

"I try to get fresh fruit, but when I can't, I'm really glad to be able to give my kids the canned kind." —S.J.

Your Gift: Canned fruit, dried fruit, freeze-dried fruit, applesauce.

Why They Need It:

Fruit is essential for any healthy diet.

- Fruit loses some vitamins when it's canned or dried—notably vitamin C—but it retains B vitamins, vitamins A and E, and minerals like potassium. That makes this fruit a key souce of nutrition for food bank clients.

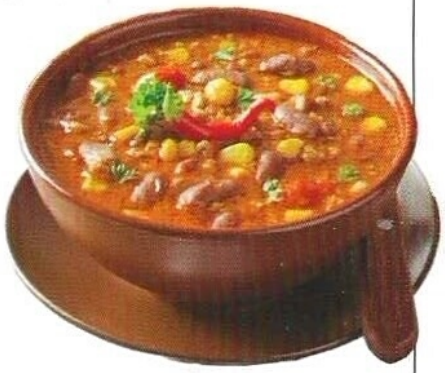
Smart Shopping:

- Choose canned fruit packed in water or its own juice. Any syrup—even "light" syrup—just adds empty calories.
- Dried fruit is a good snack for kids, preferably with no sugar added. Dried berries are especially healthy.

Soup's On!

"It's great when the food bank has different kinds of soup to pick from. It gives us a chance to pick what we like." —M.A.

Your Gift: Hearty soups and stews.



Why They Need It:

- These are popular in winter because they're hot and easy to prepare.
- Many canned soups have limited nutritional value. That's why food banks prefer "hearty" soups or stews—with added veggies, more vitamins, and more fiber. Soups with meat, lentils, or beans are also a good source of protein.

Smart Shopping:

- Dietitians recommend "reduced salt," "no added salt," or low sodium—no more than 250 mg per serving.
- At least 3 grams of daily fiber per serving, and no more than 3 grams of fat per serving, are recommended.
- Compare and pick the soups with the most nutrients.

Eat Your Veggies

"I always rinse my canned vegetables before I cook them. It removes a lot of the extra salt ." —V. O.

Your Gift: Canned vegetables.

Why They Need It: Your mom was right—it's important to eat veggies. They provide vitamins, minerals, fiber, and much more.

- Many canned veggies are nearly as nutritious as fresh veggies. The produce is picked and canned at its peak, so even though the heating process used in canning reduces some vitamins, the majority of nutrients remain.

Smart Shopping:

- Look for *low sodium or no added salt* on the label.
- Canned tomatoes, corn, and carrots provide high amounts of some antioxidants.
- Other healthy canned veggies include green beans, spinach, beets, asparagus, and peas.

Beans, Beans, the Magical Fruit...

"Beans are the 'old standby' for me. I count on 'em."—J.M.

Your Gift: Black beans, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, lentils—pretty much any kind of beans, canned or dried, including chili.

Why They Need It: Beans are a nutritional powerhouse. They're a low-fat source of protein, plus a great source of fiber, B vitamins, iron, potassium, magnesium, and more.

- For example, a cup of lentils has 17 grams of protein with less than 1 gram of fat.

Smart Shopping:

- If you're buying canned beans or canned chili, look for *"low sodium"* on the label.
- A big bag of dry beans is a great value on every level. The food bank can break it into many portions, so it's *high yield, high nutrition, low cost!*

Got Milk?

"At first, I took 'boxed milk' because I had to. But my kids were surprised that it tastes like fresh. Now we like it!" —S.A.

Your Gift: Shelf-stable milk, powdered dry milk.

Why They Need It: For the same reasons anyone needs milk; it's a good source of protein, calcium, and vitamins A, D, E, and K, and more. Powdered dry milk is a high-protein alternative.

- Shelf-stable milk is the same as fresh pasteurized milk, except it's heated to 284° to kill bacteria instead of 170°. That's why food banks can store it without refrigeration.

Smart Shopping:

- Shelf-stable milk often isn't displayed near fresh milk—you may have to ask for it.
- To get real powdered milk—not a "milk alternative"—check the label. Ingredients should be *milk, vitamins A & D3, and palmitate.*

Super Carbs

"It was amazing to find out how much healthier brown rice is than white rice. I had no idea!" —D.R.

Your Gift: Whole grain pasta, brown rice.

Why They Need It: All pasta and rice are popular at food banks. But both are healthiest when they're *whole grain.*

- *Whole grain* means they still have the outer *bran* shell and inner *germ* layer that contain most of the fiber, vitamins, other nutrients.
- When rice and pasta are white, these layers have been stripped off. Some nutrients, like iron and B vitamins, are often added back—but food companies only add back a fraction of what was lost.

Smart Shopping:

- Check the ingredients list. All grain/flour labels should include the word "whole." Brown rice is automatically whole grain.
- The package front should say *100% whole grain* or *100% whole wheat.*

Special Needs

Here are some additional items to consider when you're shopping.

Healthy snacks. Especially for families with kids. Suggested: Granola bars, yogurt, milk boxes, dried fruit, whole grain crackers. One expert writes, "Anything a child would be thrilled to find in his or her lunchbox (that isn't straight junk food) will generally be received enthusiastically wherever you donate."

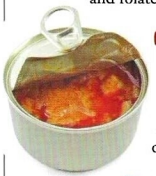
Packaged meals. This includes mac & cheese, canned spaghetti & meatballs, canned ravioli, and other foods that don't have to be cooked—just reheated. They may not be the healthiest foods, but they're important to clients with limited cooking facilities.

Cooking oil. Important for cooking but because it tends to be expensive, food banks often count on people like you to donate it. Olive, canola, and sunflower oils are good choices.

Condiments & spices. Food donors often forget these items, but they're really needed. Suggested: Light mayo, mustard, ketchup, salt & pepper.

Jam & jelly/ Honey. Jam isn't very nutritious, but for some kids it's an essential companion to peanut butter. Honey is a good alternative. Jam with "no sugar added" is best. Try to avoid high fructose corn syrup.

Tomato sauce. Go for *reduced* or *low sodium*. Tomatoes are a good source of potassium, niacin, vitamin B6, and folate—a heart-healthy combo of nutrients.



Convenient-to-open packaging, easy-to-carry food. Homeless people need items like canned foods with pop-top lids (no opener needed) and single-serving containers—easy to carry and easy to eat.

For infants. "Food insecurity might arguably be the most frightening for parents of infants," says one expert. Help them out with baby formula, infant cereal, diapers, wipes, and baby food in jars. Important note: No outdated infant foods!

Non-food items. Most food banks welcome donations of toilet paper, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, disposable razors, tissues, and other necessities. Check with your food bank for more details.

Pay attention to...

the labels on the package! Here are four key ingredients to check for when you're shopping for nonperishable food.

Sodium. Every day the average American eats 50% more of this essential mineral than recommended. Possible result: high blood pressure, which can cause heart disease. Many canned foods have high sodium levels.

Sugar. Processed foods can contain surprising amounts of sugar—which can add to risks of diabetes and obesity. Compare products; go for the one with less sugar.

Chicken Noodle Soup

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup (120 ml) condensed soup
Servings Per Container about 2.5

Amount Per Serving

Calories 60	Calories from Fat 10
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 1.5g	2%
Saturated Fat 0.5g	3%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 15mg	5%
Sodium 660mg	27%
Total Carbohydrate 8g	3%
Dietary Fiber 1g	4%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 4%	**Calcium** 2%
Vitamin C 0%	**Iron** 2%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Whole grains. This is an ingredient you *want* in your food. Whole grains are complex carbohydrates that provide fiber and essential B-vitamins, iron, and zinc. Eating them lowers your risk for many chronic diseases.

Fat. Foods containing saturated fats can raise cholesterol—which increases our risk of heart disease and stroke.

A Shopping List

Here's a list to take with you when you go to the grocery store. Remember, anything helps! Check with your local food bank to find out what's most needed in your area.

GENERAL FOOD ITEMS

Whole grain breakfast cereal
Canned fish & meat
Peanut butter & other nut butters
Nuts
Oatmeal
Canned fruit
Dried fruit
Applesauce
Hearty soups and stews
Canned vegetables
Beans
Shelf-stable milk
Powdered dry milk
Whole grain pasta
Brown rice
Healthy snacks
Packaged meals
Cooking oil
Condiments & spices
Tomato sauce
Canned tomato products
Jams & jelly
Honey

INFANT ITEMS

Baby formula
Infant cereal
Baby food in jars
Diapers
Wipes

Thanks to...

OUR EXPERTS

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For info about this booklet and our Green Bag Food Collection Program, contact

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