

## Guidance for Nutritious Food Aid

**Food insecurity** is a term used to describe when someone is unable to access or afford nutritious and safe food, which is also socially and culturally acceptable, in order to live a happy, healthy and active life. Evidence shows that food insecurity (sometimes called food poverty) is bad for people's diets and physical and mental health.

We are very grateful for the ongoing work of food banks and other food projects such as food pantries and clubs, community cafés and on-street feeding projects in supporting Birmingham residents who are experiencing food insecurity. We want to support you to address food insecurity to its fullest extent by providing as nutritious food as possible. To this end, this resource has been developed by the Food System Team in the Public Health Division at Birmingham City Council, as a tool to be used by food banks and other food aid providers where possible. This document provides guidelines on how to put together a nutritionally balanced food parcel, with ingredients that can be cooked into a meal. The same principles also apply for cooked food. It also considers individual requirements such as food intolerances/allergies, cultural preferences and cooking facilities. For further info, please see the Eatwell Guide: [The Eatwell Guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

### Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are a key part of a healthy, balanced diet and we should aim to eat at least 5 portions of them every day. A portion is 80 grams. Examples include:

- Tinned tomatoes
- Tins of fruit e.g., peaches, pears, oranges
- Tinned vegetables e.g., sweetcorn, carrots, spinach, okra
- Jars of vegetables e.g., olives, pickles
- Dried fruit e.g., raisins, prunes, figs, apricots
- Long life vegetable or fruit juice

### Carbohydrate-rich and Starchy Foods

Starchy foods are a good source of energy in our diet and contain fibre which benefits digestion. Examples include:

- Cereal products e.g., cereals, porridge, oats, crackers
- Bread, including roti and wraps
- Rice
- Pasta
- Noodles
- Couscous and bulgur wheat
- Potato, sweet potato, and yam
- Plantain
- Cassava

When possible, choose wholegrain varieties such as wholegrain bread/pasta & brown rice.

### Protein-Rich Foods

We need protein for growth, repair and maintenance in the body, and it is especially important for our muscles and bones.

Examples include:

- Tins of beans and pulses e.g., baked beans, lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans (dried pulses can take a lot of energy to cook)
- Tinned fish e.g., sardines, tuna
- Tins of meat e.g., chicken, beef, stewed meat
- Tofu (long-life form)
- Nuts e.g., peanuts, cashews, walnuts

### Dairy and Dairy Alternatives

Milk and dairy products are great sources of protein and calcium. Unsweetened calcium-fortified dairy alternatives are food for individuals who can't or choose not to consume dairy products. Examples include:

- UHT milk
- Dried milk powder
- Unsweetened fortified alternatives e.g., soya milk, oat milk, almond milk
- Tins or pots of dairy-based desserts e.g., rice pudding, semolina, soya desserts

### High Fat, Salt and Sugar Foods

Foods such as chocolate, cakes, crisps and biscuits are high in fat, salt and sugar. These types of food are not essential for our diets, can harm health if eaten regularly, and often actually tend to make people feel less full. These foods should be consumed in small amounts, less often.

### Access to Refrigeration Facilities

If you and those receiving food have access to refrigeration facilities, you could also include fresh/frozen fruits, vegetables, meat and fish. In addition, dairy products such as yoghurt, fresh milk and cheese could be included.

### Other Items to Include

Seasoning (spices, dried herbs, stock cubes), oil (if possible, provide olive, rapeseed or sunflower), jars of sauce (pesto, pasta sauce, curry sauce), tea and coffee for adults, and spreads (honey, jam, peanut butter). This can help the food provided to be cooked into something tasty, supporting people's dignity and enjoyment of the food.

### Example 3 Day Food Parcel for a family of 4:

- 1 large pack of porridge oats/cereal
- 2 packs of pasta
- 2 packs of rice or couscous
- 1 box of cereal/oat bars
- 4 tins of beans
- 1 pack of lentils
- 4 tins of fruit in water/juice
- 3 tins of vegetables
- 1 jar of vegetables e.g., olives
- 2 tins of tomatoes
- Tomato puree
- 2 cartons of milk (dairy or alternative)
- 2 tins of dairy-based or soya deserts
- 2 jars of pasta/curry sauce
- 4 tins of fish/meat
- 1 pack of tea or coffee (for adults)
- 500ml bottle of oil
- 1 condiment e.g., soy sauce/ketchup
- 1 pack of biscuits
- Seasoning e.g., garlic/chilli powder
- 1 carton of long-life fruit juice

*Adapted from the Independent Food Aid Network Child Friendly Guidelines*

### Access to Cooking Facilities

It's important to consider that many people using food banks and other food aid providers may not have access to cooking facilities, which impacts the range of food that they can prepare. Having limited cooking facilities can make it harder to eat a healthy and balanced diet, however there are still nutritious options that can be included in a food parcel. This includes tins of fruit and vegetables, tins of beans and meat and long-life dairy products. It is important to ask people who use the service what cooking facilities they have access to, in order to tailor a food parcel to their needs.

### Dietary Requirements and Cultural Preferences

Food insecurity can result in families no longer having the element of choice in order to be able to eat, as the foods that may be affordable and accessible do not align with their taste and cultural preferences. It is important, when possible, to give people foods which are familiar to them as it is one way of reducing the stigma of accessing support. Dietary requirements, such as food intolerances and allergies, should also be considered to ensure that food parcels are safe for the recipients.

### Useful Questions to Ask People Receiving Food

- What cooking facilities do you have available? E.g., kettle, microwave, oven
- What cooking equipment do you have available? E.g., sharp knives, tin opener
- Do you have access to a fridge or freezer?
- Do you have any dietary requirements, such as food allergies or intolerances?
- Are there any foods that you or your family don't like or don't eat?
- What foods do you or your family like to eat and cook with?

### Healthy Start

Healthy Start is a scheme which helps families to buy healthy food and milk. If eligible, people can be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that can be used in some UK shops. The card can be used to buy; plain liquid cow's milk; fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables; fresh, dried, and tinned pulses; and infant formula milk based on cow's milk. The card can also be used to collect **Healthy Start vitamins** and **vitamin drops** for babies and young children.

Find out more here: [What is Healthy Start | Healthy Start | Birmingham City Council](#)