

HEALTHY FOOD DRIVE TIPS

Community food drives provide an important source of food for families trying to make ends meet. They also give communities the chance to help their neighbors. While food pantries and the people they serve are grateful for all donations, food drive sponsors also have the chance to solicit an assortment of healthy foods to help families who use food pantries have better diets.

WHY HEALTHY FOODS

In the United States today, health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity are common. Unfortunately, the prevalence of these conditions is often higher among people who use food pantries, as seen in the table below.

Table 1. Health conditions of Missouri food pantry customers

	Pantry Customers ¹	Missouri State Average ²
Diabetes	23.4%	9.6%
High blood pressure	50.5%	32.0%
High cholesterol	45.3%	38.8%
BMI in obesity range	51.1%	30.4%

Poor health and the high prevalence of chronic disease create multiple barriers and hardships for food pantry recipients, their families, and the programs that assist them. For example:

- Approximately one-fourth of people living with a chronic illness are significantly limited in their daily activities.³ Coupled with the stress of being hungry or the threat of being hungry, pantry customers and their families can miss educational and employment opportunities.
- These stressors in turn create a downward spiral for food pantry customers, given that health is determined in part by one's social environment, including how much education a person has, one's ability to get and keep a job, one's occupation, and how much money a person earns⁴. Seventy-four percent of food pantry households live at or below the poverty level.¹
- More broadly, the hunger-related costs of increased illness, poor educational outcomes, lost lifetime earnings, and charitable contributions to help address hunger in Missouri alone are \$3.6 billion.⁵

Addressing the issue of poor health within a population that is largely food insecure and living below the poverty

level is a challenging yet important issue to address if communities hope to create opportunities for all people to lead healthy and productive lives.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The good news is that many health conditions can be controlled in part by the foods we eat. Eating fruits and vegetables, beans, whole grains, lean proteins, and foods that are lower in salt and sugar can go a long way toward improving health.

The following list contains common food drive foods, with a healthy twist.

- Canned vegetables without added salt
- Low-sodium canned soup
- Canned fruit in juice or light syrup
- Canned tuna and chicken in water
- Peanut butter
- Canned or dried beans
- Unsweetened cereal
- Oatmeal
- 100% juice

MAKING IT HAPPEN

- When announcing and publicizing the food drive, emphasize the point that the food drive is a bit different – donations of healthy food will be requested to help improve the health of families in the community. Include this information, including a list of healthy foods, in newsletter articles, fliers, emails, press releases, and radio and television interviews.
- Challenge donors to really put the healthy in the food drive. It's one thing to grab food from the back of the cupboard. It's another thing to carefully select or purchase food that will help people have healthy, balanced diets.
- Sort the food. As the food comes in, track how much food matches the food on the list. Keep track of this and use it to compare the results of future healthy food drives.
- Offer awards or prizes for groups or individuals who donate the most healthy food, not just the most food.
- Take pictures of the food and publicize its success. Let the rest of the community know how the food drive went and how it will make an impact in the lives of families in your community.

References

¹Foulkes, M., Heflin, C., Hermesen, J., Raedeke, N., and Rikoon, S. (2013). Coping with Hunger in 2013: Food Pantry Clients and Households in the Service Region of the Food Bank for Central and Northeast Missouri. Columbia: University of Missouri, Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security. Accessed online at <http://foodsecurity.missouri.edu/projects/food-pantry-client-research/>

²Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Behavioral Risk Factor and Surveillance System," 2013. <http://health.mo.gov/data/brfss/index.php>.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). The Power to Prevent, The Call to Control: At a Glance 2009. Accessed online at <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/chronic.htm>.

⁴Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Social Determinants of Health: Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed online at <http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/FAQ.html#c>.

⁵The Center for American Progress (2011). Hunger in America: Suffering We All Pay For. Accessed online at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/report/2011/10/05/10504/hunger-in-america/>.

