

Think Outside the Box (and Can)

Donate Healthy Food This Season

It's the season of giving and thanksgiving, and many of us will be asked to donate to food drives to help support families in our communities. We may turn to our pantry and grab something to donate without giving it much thought: a box of noodles or a can of soup. While these choices play an important role in stocking the shelves at local food pantries, we should remember that patrons at food pantries, our very own friends and neighbors, reflect many of the same health and nutrition concerns that our own families experience. Conditions like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and a person's simple desire to feel well based on the amount and quality of food he or she eats mean we should watch the preservatives, sodium content, added sugar, and overall nutritional value in the food we donate.

When we are asked to donate food to a food pantry, take care to donate high quality food that you would choose for your own family. Here are a couple of those quality non-perishable foods that will help your family give from the heart and *for* the heart:

- Bags of white or brown rice without added flavorings, which are often high in salt.
- Boxes of quick-cook barley
- Baby food in plastic packaging or pouches; choose those without added sugars or preservatives
- Whole-wheat pasta
- High quality granola or protein bars without a lot of added sugar
- Boxes of cereal high in fiber, low in sugar
- Quick-cooking oatmeal
- Bags of dried beans
- Dried fruit and/or nuts
- Coffee or tea
- Canned tuna
- Bottles of basic spices or salt-and-pepper sets
- Low-sodium saltines or whole grain crackers
- Bottled juices like V8
- Alternatively, toothbrushes and toothpaste or bar soap

Ideally, these staples will already be in your pantry. Choose them routinely and buy a little extra so you can share, too. Remember, pantries also accept cash donations and grocery store gift cards to purchase fresh produce, meat and dairy for their patrons. Sharing good food with one another helps build healthier communities. We can all play a role!