SPECTRUM HEALTH

Healthier Communities

Every Meal Matters
A Guide for Hunger Relief Charities

It is a basic human right to have access to safe and healthy meals every day. All meals should be created with fresh, health-sustaining ingredients and be served with dignity and respect. Healthy meals make a healthy community.

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Introduction

In the last several decades, "hunger" has become an institutionalized concept in our nation. From the intricate business models of food banking to the normalcy of hearing about our hungry neighbors and conducting food drives, we have constructed vast and complicated systems in order to deal with the issues of food insecurity in our nation.

In the same time period, food production technology has grown vastly, giving us new ways to get foodlike product cheaper and faster. Growing your own food has become a distant concept for many, and former cultural practices and roles have changed, negatively affecting access to good food.

Much of the work of the charitable food system has been reactionary. Because of this, a common belief in the United States is that charitable food organizations such as food banks, food pantries, and group meal sites simply need any type of food to feed the vulnerable population, regardless of nutritional quality.

Because of this mistaken view, our nation's thousands of charitable food organizations constantly receive food items that contribute to poor health in low-income populations, rather than empowering patrons with healthy options.

Our nation is currently seeing staggering health disparities between low-income and higher income populations. Food is a factor: low-income communities have higher rates of diabetes and other food-related diseases. The charitable food system has contributed to these disparities in the past and must now take responsibility for the food we choose to accept and serve and the environment of health we decide to create.

The way forward is through promoting the message that the charitable food system has a vision not only to feed people, but to see our community sustained with nutritious foods that contribute to a better quality of life. Charitable food organizations can take hold of our responsibility to create healthy neighborhoods, and can positively contribute to the health of our nation by ensuring that the food we serve is healthful and nutritious.

This guide serves as a catalyst for establishing organizational goals centered on health and nutrition. By endorsing this guide through creating and implementing standards of nutrition, organizations will foster and impact a shift in health for those they serve, and will move forward in achieving the vision of creating a healthier community for all.

The way forward is through promoting the message that the charitable food system has a vision not only to feed people, but to see our community sustained with nutritious foods that contribute to a better quality of life.

Emma Garcia, Program Director
Access of West Michigan

Case Study: Executive Director Drives Organizational Change

In 2009, dietitian Lisa Sisson published a study titled "Evaluation of Nutrients Served in Soup Kitchens in the Heartside District of Grand Rapids." She found that people eating in the neighborhood were being overfed high-calorie meals with little nutritional quality. With many guests of the soup kitchens being at risk or having nutrition-related diseases, these meals could be detrimental to their health.

When Stuart Ray, executive director of Guiding Light Mission, was informed of the results of the study and other statistics about the health of the residents of the neighborhood, he decided to change his own mission through the meals he served. He knew that improving the nutritional value of the meals was good for Guiding Light's programs, staff, and the community. It required changes in the kitchen, including removing the fryer and taking salt shakers off the table. It took time for staff to adjust, but with leadership taking a stand on health and being willing to confront any backlash, the staff grew used to the changes.

Serving healthy meals differentiates Guiding Light's programs from other programs in the neighborhood.

Staying healthy keeps insurance costs down. The staff at Guiding Light Mission make no contribution to their employee health insurance. This makes it very important to Stuart to keep his staff healthy. Giving them access to a nutritious meal at work and leading by example—for instance, eating the same lunch as staff and residents—are important to his mission.

Serving healthy meals differentiates Guiding Light's programs from other programs in the neighborhood. Stuart believes that he can either be part of the problem or fix it. By serving more nutritious meals, he is trying to fix it. He sees it as an ethical obligation to the community he serves. Many residents of the program have seen health benefits such as weight loss, improved blood sugars, and better blood pressure while being in the program. This is an example that they can take with them when they leave.

He also works with the kitchen manager to sort through the large amounts of donated food that Guiding Light receives, decide what to serve to people in the program, and pass along the rest to other food pantries.

Guiding Light shows that leadership can change an organization's culture. From eating the healthy lunch that is provided to securing nutrition standards for food donations, Stuart maintains a culture of health through leading by example and showing that healthy meals are a priority in his organization.

Case Study: Grassroots Organization Empowers Neighbors to Improve Their Health

Our Kitchen Table (OKT) has been working in the Eastown, Baxter, SECA/Southtown, and Garfield Park neighborhoods of Grand Rapids since 2003. Our Kitchen Table is a grassroots environmental justice organization that works to strengthen the capacity of neighborhood residents to address food and environmental health disparities impacting vulnerable families and children. Our Kitchen Table's Food Diversity Program includes a yard gardening program, the Southeast Area Farmers' Market, and advocacy for food justice and environmental policies.

Our Kitchen Table participants take their health in their own hands by growing their own foods and becoming advocates for their health and the food system they are a part of.

Lisa Oliver-King, executive director of the program, explains that Our Kitchen Table uses the term "affordable food" to mean nutritious, fresh, health-sustaining food. OKT's Food Diversity Project focuses on food justice by working hand in hand with participants to improve access to locally grown, chemical-free produce. Better access to fresh produce helps address health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and asthma. This differs from traditional approaches that are driven by professionals and rely on the user to comply. Through its Community Transformational Organizing Strategy, OKT is able to help participants become advocates for themselves and their own health. OKT participants take their health in their own hands by growing their own foods and becoming advocates for their health and the food system they are a part of.

Lisa's background is in public health, and her goal is to spread a message of health, including healthy lifestyles and healthy environments, throughout the neighborhoods where OKT works. The organization does this through many different activities, including a gardening program, which provides starter plants, compost containers, organic soil, soil testing, garden education, and garden coaches for participants of the program. OKT co-sponsors the Southeast Area Famer's Market, and organizes free community events on a variety of topics, like foraging, cooking, canning, gardening, composting, and food justice. Bicycle tours and walking tours are other unique outings that OKT offers.

OKT has also partnered with many local organizations, such as Grand Rapids Public Schools, Baxter Community Center, Kent County Juvenile Detention Center, The Bloom Collective, Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy, Well House, and Salvation Army's teen parent program, in growing food. Lisa and OKT believe everyone has the right to good, nutritious, sustainable food, and are determined to make that happen in their own neighborhoods.

Case Study: Gleaning Food Contributes to the Health of a Community

Lisa Sisson, a dietitian and professor at Grand Valley State University, along with her coauthor, Professor Deborah Lown, published a study titled "Do Soup Kitchen Meals Contribute to Suboptimal Nutrient Intake & Obesity in the Homeless Population?" They found that free meals available to low-income residents provided high calories with little nutritional value. Lisa continued to work with neighborhood residents to provide nutrition education and to offer food and nutrition advice to the facilities that served meals. She also researched gleaning programs that recover produce from farmers' markets.

Lisa began to pull together residents of Heartside—people already working on health and nutrition in their neighborhood—as well as others who could contribute a variety of skills, to create the Heartside Gleaning Initiative (HGI). The organization's mission is "to empower the Heartside community to become healthier through nutrition education and increased access to healthy foods," defined as fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs.

In its first year the initiative gleaned 17,291 pounds of food from 40 different farms.

The Heartside Gleaning Initiative began gleaning produce from the Fulton Street Farmers Market and the Downtown Market in June 2014 and finished the season in October. In its first year the initiative gleaned 17,291 pounds of food from 40 different farms. The food was distributed to food pantries, to missions and directly to residents. Over 60 volunteers gave 1,600 hours in the first year of the program.

A variety of stakeholders have shared their experiences with the Heartside Gleaning Initiative:

Earthkeeper Farm is delighted to work with HGI. They make donating produce an easy and efficient process, which lightens the burden of dealing with surplus. I love knowing that our crops are going to help improve issues of food access and nutrition in the community. Thank you, Gleaners!

—Andrew Bostwick, Owner, Earthkeeper Farm

I think this is a great program, not only because it gives a chance for the farmers to give back, but also enables people who can't afford vegetables to have a chance to live a healthy lifestyle.

—Britta Carlson, Volunteer

The best progress to see was when handing things out at Dwelling Place. Kids one week ask "What is that?" then come back the next week and now it's "Got any more of that?" A lot of these families don't have any other access to fruits and veggies. I and many others I know have diabetes and other health issues. I can see, with my medical history, how having access to fresh fruits and vegetables makes a difference. It's all about breaking the cycle.

—Cora Arch, Heartside resident

A survey of program users showed that 70% of the participants used all of the produce they received, 87% of the participants shared their produce with family or neighbors, and 100% of the participants were satisfied with the program. This program exists in a community where nearly 50% of the residents live beneath the poverty line and 76% experience hunger and food deprivation. There are plans to develop more distribution sites, install food sharing boxes for those who can't come pick up the produce, and possibly glean food from more markets or directly from farmers and other retail outlets.

What is Healthy?

What is a healthy diet? We are bombarded with nutrition messages every day, from magazine covers and billboards to streets full of fast-food restaurants and rows of packaged items in the grocery aisles. It is difficult to look past these things and visualize what healthy eating looks like.

A healthy diet should provide you with balanced nutrition and essential nutrients to support your energy needs, help you maintain a healthy weight, and lower your risk for disease. A healthy diet includes a variety of foods that taste good, are appropriate for your culture, and are safe to eat. The Harvard School of Public Health makes these 10 recommendations for a healthy diet:

1. **Choose good carbohydrates:** whole grains (the less processed the better), vegetables, fruits, and beans. Avoid white bread, white rice, and the like as well as pastries, sugared sodas, and other highly processed food.
2. **Pay attention to the protein package:** good choices include fish, poultry, nuts, and beans. Try to avoid red meat.
3. **Choose foods containing healthy fats.** Plant oils, nuts, and fish are the best choices. Limit consumption of saturated fats, and avoid foods with trans fat.
4. **Choose a fiber-filled diet** that includes whole grains, vegetables and fruits.
5. **Eat more vegetables and fruits**—the more colorful and varied, the better.
6. **Calcium is important**, but milk is not its best source. Good sources of calcium are collards, bok choy, fortified soy milk, baked beans, and supplements that contain calcium and vitamin D.
7. **Water is the best source of liquid.** Avoid sugary drinks, and limit intake of juices and milk. Coffee, tea, artificially sweetened drinks, 100 percent fruit juices, low-fat milk, and alcohol can fit into a healthy diet but are best consumed in moderation. Sports drinks are recommended only for people who exercise more than an hour at a stretch, to replace substances lost in sweat.
8. **Limit salt intake.** Choose more fresh foods instead of processed ones.
9. **Moderate alcohol** drinking has health benefits, but is not recommended for everyone.
10. **Daily multivitamin and extra vitamin D** intake has potential health benefits.

Many well-respected health organizations recommend a diet that mainly consists of unprocessed plant foods and emphasizes a wide range of whole grains, legumes, and non-starchy vegetables and fruits in a variety of colors, including red, green, yellow, white, purple, and orange. This diet is low in energy density, which may protect against weight gain, and highlights foods that reduce the risk of diet-related diseases.

Food Insecurity

People in many neighborhoods have a difficult time accessing the foods included in a healthy diet for a variety of reasons. Some residents are unemployed or underemployed, some don't have their own kitchens to prepare food, and some need supplemental food to make the groceries they have stretch for a longer period of time. Low-income neighborhoods often lack full-service grocery stores that offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. If they do offer those foods, they are expensive and also at a lower quality. Foods that are high in added sugars and fats and refined grains are cheaper and always available. Lower-income neighborhoods also have more fast-food restaurants providing high-calorie foods with little nutritional value at low prices.

The USDA defines food insecurity as a household-level economic and social condition of limited access to food. Food insecurity also refers to not being able to afford nutritionally adequate and safe food.

Characteristics of food insecurity include:

- Worrying that food will run out before you can buy more
- Not being able to afford balanced meals
- Adults eating smaller meals or skipping meals to give available food to children in the household
- Feeling hungry from not eating enough food
- Not eating for an entire day to save food

An article published in The Huffington Post by Eleanor Goldberg, using facts from Feeding America's Hunger in America 2014 study, highlights coping strategies that people use to battle food insecurity. The title is "8 Impossible Choices People Who Can't Afford Food Make Every Day."

These coping strategies are:

- Filling up on cheap, fatty foods.
- Choosing between buying food and paying for medicine, even when they are insured.
- Watering down food and beverages to make them last longer. This is especially dangerous to do with infant formula.
- Eating food that is expired or buying dented and damaged cans. Expired food is usually safe well beyond the expiration date—except for meat (due to listeria) and dented cans (which are at risk for clostridium botulinum).

- Choosing between paying utility bills and buying food.
- Choosing between paying housing costs and buying food.
- Choosing between education costs and food.
- Choosing between transportation costs and food.

It's clear that the lack of access to nutritiously adequate and safe foods could lead to poor health, obesity, and poor nutrition. These problems are further explained in the following excerpts from the report The Paradox of Hunger and Obesity in America, developed by the Center on Hunger and Poverty and the Food Research and Action Center (http://bit.ly/1KoFj8x):

The need to maximize caloric intake:

Families with a limited budget for food need to stretch those dollars as far as possible. Therefore, they may consume lower-cost foods with relatively higher levels of calories per dollar to keep from being hungry more frequently. When they lack the resources to purchase the healthier foods they desire, this will affect the quality and energy density of the diet.

The trade-off between food quantity and quality:

Research done on coping strategies of food-insecure households shows that people will change the quality or variety of food they purchase before they will reduce the amount of food eaten. This means that families might be eating enough food to avoid feeling hungry, but they may be poorly nourished because they are buying lower-cost food, lacking in nutrition.

Overeating when food is available:

Repeated ups and downs in food availability can cause people to overeat when food is available. The cycle of overeating, then going without food, causes weight gain. Research shows that low-income mothers restrict their own food intake in order to make sure their children have food. This may cause them to eat more when food is available, which contributes to obesity among poor women.

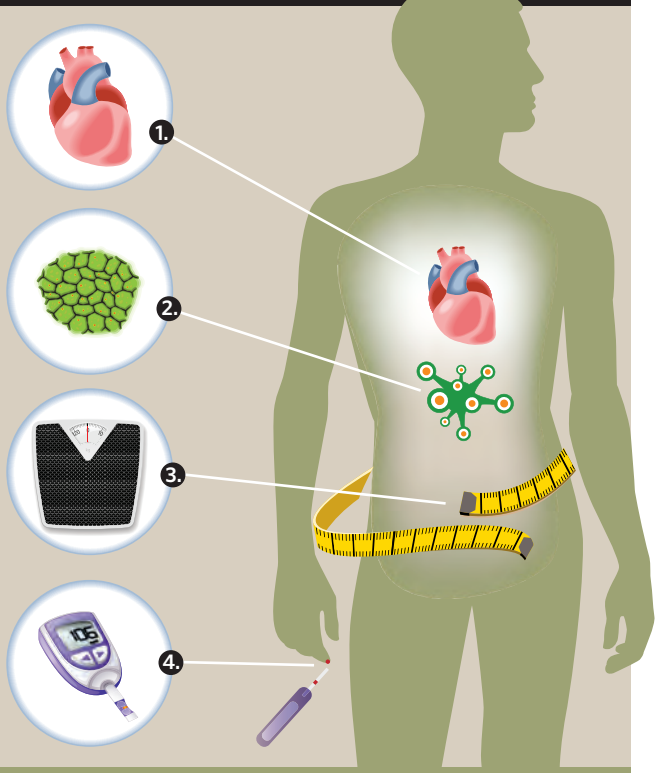
Physiological changes:

The body goes through physiological changes to help conserve energy when the diet is inadequate. Bodies become more efficient at storing fat during periodic food shortages.

Costly consequences:

Hunger, food insecurity, and obesity have consequences. Obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and several cancers, and is associated with increased healthcare costs and lost productivity. Other consequences include impaired health status, which makes it difficult to resist illness. Another is impaired cognitive function in children, causing negative behaviors and reduced ability to learn. With less ability to buy healthy food and to obtain health care, the poor are at risk for experiencing food insecurity and obesity, with all of the associated consequences. The following infographic shows the connection between diet and chronic health conditions.

Chronic Illnesses Related To Diet



1. HEART DISEASE:
No. 1 cause of death in Michigan (23,502 in 2012).
Risk factors: poor diet, overweight/obesity, smoking, lack of physical activity, diabetes and pre-diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and family history of heart disease.

2. CANCER:
An important cause of death in Michigan (20,395 in 2012).
Risk factors: The most common modifiable risk factors for cancer are tobacco use, exposure to the sun, radiation, chemicals and other substances, some viruses and bacteria, certain hormones, alcohol, poor diet, lack of physical activity, and being overweight.

3. OBESITY:
Michigan has the 17th highest rate (30.7% of adult population) for obesity in adults.
Risk factors: family lifestyle, poor diet, lack of sleep, certain illnesses and medications.

4. DIABETES:
More than 1 million adults in Michigan have diabetes.
Risk factors: overweight/obesity, lack of regular leisure-time exercise, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Source: michigan.gov/mdhhs, November 2015

Donating Healthy Food

Access to balanced meals and healthy foods is one way we can help those experiencing food insecurity. Having nutritious options available at pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency food agencies helps make it easier for people to make healthy choices when they have limited resources. Providing emergency food is not just about calories, it should be about nutritional balance and a positive impact on health and wellness. We need to think of the impact on quality of life and the health of the community. Bob Aiken, CEO of Feeding America, said, "We have an obligation to ensure that a significant percentage of the food our clients receive through our network is healthful and nutrient-rich, and that providing such foods to our clients is the new frontier of food banking."

Providing emergency food is not just about calories, it should be about nutritional balance and a positive impact on health and wellness.

Talking Points—
The Importance of Offering Healthier Foods

Adapted from the Ramsey County Minnesota Healthy Meals Coalition

- Eliminating hunger is not just about providing calories, it is about the nutrients the healthier foods contain. If we continue to focus on only satisfying the physiological need of hunger, we are limiting the possibilities of what could be offered.
- By offering healthy foods, you are providing more choices. Many people using the charitable food system have limited access to healthier options, and if they have access they may not be able to afford those options. Typically, greater access and affordability are associated with high-fat, high-sodium, sugar-containing, prepackaged and commercially prepared foods that lack vitamins and minerals.
- Not offering healthy meals is exercising regulation and control over the community's health. Surveys show that the underserved want access to fruits and vegetables and healthy meals, but there is a lack in their neighborhoods or the cost is too great at the store. If we can provide the healthier options, we should.
- It's about accepting the right foods from donors that allow us to improve the quality of meals and foods we provide—in turn alleviating the health problems of the communities we serve.
- It should be a basic human right to have access to safe and healthy meals every day.

Every Meal Matters

Who uses the charitable food system?

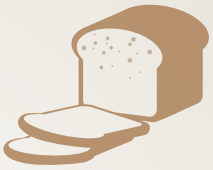
Your neighbors or even your friends and family. People no different from you or I,simply someone down on their luck due to a job loss, business venture gone sour, or struggling financially as they battle a serious illness.

1 in 4 Kids

in Kent County are food insecure (20.3%)

(Feeding America "Map the Meal Gap" Study. Data released April 2012)

1 in 6 Adults



in Kent County are food insecure

(ACCESS of West Michigan)

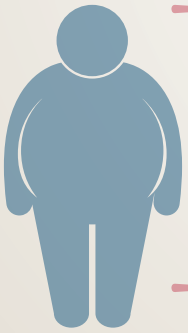
Food insecurity and health: What's the link?

When people are food insecure they are less likely to eat fruits and veggies, and more likely to fill the gaps with processed foods high in sugar, fat, and calories. This type of eating leads to a higher risk of chronic disease and malnutrition.

(Neter J, et al. Food insecurity among Dutch food bank recipients: a cross sectional study. BMJ Open 2014.)

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Michigan. In 2009 only 4.6 % of Michiganians reported engaging in all 4 healthy lifestyles that reduce risk for cardiovascular disease: healthy weight, adequate fruit and vegetable intake, not smoking, and adequate physical activity.

(2013 Michigan Cardiovascular Disease Fact Sheet)



People in America who live in the most poverty-dense counties are those most prone to obesity.

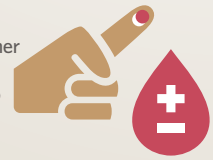
(American Diabetes Association 2011)

What is food insecurity?

Not always knowing where or when your next meal will come from means you are food insecure; a state that impacts adults, children, and adolescents.

Low-income groups have a **20%** higher risk of diabetes than high income groups.

(Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice (2013) 99:3;372-379)



Food insecurity among young children is associated with poorer physical quality of life, which may prevent them from fully engaging in daily activities such as school and social interaction with peers.

(Casey, P.H., Szeto, K.L., Robbins, J.M., Stuff, J.E., Connell, C., Gossett, J.M., & Simpson, P.M. (2005). Child health-related quality of life and household food security. Archives Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 15, 51-56.)

Approximately **150,000 prediabetic adults** 21 years and older live in Kent county. People with prediabetes have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Individuals at greatest risk of developing diabetes in Michigan are African Americans, individuals with no college education, and households that earn less than $25,000 per year.

(Diabetes Risk Factors Community Profile Kent County December 2013)

Nutritional Goals for Soup Kitchen Meals

Soup kitchens often rely on donated food and small budgets to provide meals for large crowds. This means balancing time, labor, and budget to prepare meals for guests, some of whom may be diabetic or have hypertension, high cholesterol, kidney disease, or heart disease. This makes the nutritional value of the meal extremely important. Some guests eat their only meal of the day at a soup kitchen. Nutritious meals can be achieved even with donated food and a small budget if soup kitchens can acquire the proper donations.

In a survey of 341 guests at God's Kitchen (a program of Catholic Charities), 33% of those surveyed reported having hypertension. Forty-eight people reported being diabetic and 29 people reported having heart disease. Eighty-four percent stated that they relied on God's Kitchen (a program of Catholic Charities) to provide a well-balanced meal—which is important because over 50% said that it was the only meal program in the neighborhood that they used every day. They also rely on the meal to be a source of fruits and vegetables, with 86% of guests saying that it was important to them that the meal contained those healthy foods.

Decreasing sodium: The typical foods that are donated in the charitable food system are prepackaged, processed foods that are high in sodium. Because soup kitchens rely on donated foods to create meals, they still have to use some of these foods in their cooking. Therefore they must reduce sodium in cooking as much as possible. They continue to urge donors to give foods with reduced sodium or no added sodium, and also to give fresh fruits and vegetables to increase the nutritional content of the meals.

Decreasing sugar: Kitchens often receive foods that are high in added sugar. These can include sugar-sweetened juice, canned fruit in syrup, foods with hidden sugar, such as pasta sauces, and also sweets, like cookies, pastries, snack cakes or doughnuts. A better option to serve for dessert is yogurt and fruit, either canned in its own juice or fresh. These would be welcome donations. Donating whole-grain granola or some slivered almonds to add on top would contribute fiber and healthy fat to the meal.

Increasing whole grains: A variety of carbohydrate sources are donated in the charitable food system, but not many are whole grains. Donating whole-wheat pastas, brown rice, wild rice, and a variety of grains such as quinoa, wheat berries, or barley would help increase the fiber content of the meal and introduce some guests to foods they may not have tried before.

Increasing healthy fats: Soup kitchens need healthy fats to use in cooking, such as olive, walnut, peanut, sesame and avocado oils. These items don't show up often in the charitable food system, so access to them is a priority, making them good choices to donate. Canned salmon and tuna are also sources of healthy fats, as are a variety of nuts or olives.

Increasing fruits and vegetables: Many of the guests who use the charitable food system are lacking in their consumption of fruits and vegetables and use soup kitchens as a resource to find these items. Donating canned vegetables with low sodium or no added sodium and canned fruit in its own juice provides a healthier option to use in meals when fresh produce isn't available. Being able to have fresh fruits and vegetables on hand would help to increase fiber content and decrease added-sugar and sodium content in meals.

Food Donations—Give **This, Not That**

- **Instead of ramen noodles:** Ramen noodles provide 910 mg of sodium per serving, with 2 servings per pouch. People are most likely to eat an entire pouch containing 1,820 mg of sodium. Two servings also provide 14 g of fat and very little nutrition (0% of daily vitamin A, vitamin C, or calcium).

  Choose this: A better donation would be a can of low-sodium chicken noodle soup. An entire can is a serving with only 120 mg of sodium and 6 g of fat, and it contains twice as much protein as the ramen. The soup also provides 20% of daily needs for vitamin A and 5 g of fiber.

- **Instead of mac 'n' cheese:** The next time you reach for a box of macaroni and cheese, take a look at the nutrition facts and servings. An entire box will yield 3 high-sodium servings and requires additional ingredients that may not be available. It also lacks fiber, containing only 1 g per serving, but does contain 570 mg of sodium in each serving.

  Choose this: Instead, pick up a box of whole-grain spaghetti. The spaghetti offers 6 servings and can be tossed with many different non-perishable items that people might already have in the pantry. It also boasts 5 g of fiber per serving and no sodium. Soup kitchens could easily make use of large quantities of whole-grain pasta.

- **Instead of white rice:** White rice is inexpensive and very versatile, but did you know that it is not a good source of fiber? It is also something that people on a limited budget might already buy for themselves.

  Choose this: Instead of donating white rice, look for brown, wild, or other varieties of grains entirely. Seek whole-grain options to help bring variety to pantry shelves or soup kitchen meals.

- **Instead of soda or fruit drinks:** Sugary drinks are another product that is widely available, tends to be less expensive, and lacks nutritional value. An 8-ounce cup of sugar-sweetened juice can have 14 g of sugar, almost 4 tsp. A 12-ounce Coke has 39 g of sugar, which equals 9 1/3 tsp!

  Choose this: Since sugary products are readily available and provide no nutritional value, consider donating coffee, hot tea, or unsweetened iced tea. These items might not be found regularly on pantry shelves, and are beneficial due to disease-fighting antioxidants found in green, black, and white tea, as well as coffee. Coffee is frequently served at soup kitchens and would be a helpful donation.

- **Instead of Hamburger Helper:** Donating boxed meals may seem like a good idea to feed a family, but people may not be able to buy the hamburger they need to finish preparing the meal. Cheeseburger macaroni contains 740 mg of sodium per serving, less than a gram of fiber, and 0% of the daily value for every vitamin and mineral listed on the label. Add to that the missing protein if meat is not included, and the family in need is left with minimal nutrition.

  Choose this: A better option to donate would be shelf-stable lean protein sources. Think of low-sodium canned tuna, salmon, or chicken, or nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters. One can of low-sodium tuna contains 2 servings and only 35 mg of sodium, and is a very good source of protein. Another good example is unsalted, natural peanut butter. It contains heart-healthy fat and no sodium, and comes in a variety of sizes.

- **Instead of salty or sugary snacks:** Chips, candy, and cookies are tempting to donate because everyone deserves snacks and treats once in a while. However these foods are low in nutrition, low in cost, readily available at pantries, and easily available at corner stores.

  Choose this: Consider donating healthy snack foods instead. Choose items such as unsweetened dried fruit and unsalted or lightly salted nuts or seeds. These items can easily be combined with a whole-grain cereal to make nutrient-rich trail mix. They can be used as a topping for yogurt, or a stand-alone snack. Dried fruits, nuts, and seeds are a much healthier option than cookies, chips, or crackers because they contribute fiber and healthy fats in place of simple sugars and added salt.

Healthy Food Drive Donation Examples

Grains

- Whole grain bread or pasta
- Whole grain, low sugar, high fiber cereal
- Hearty whole grains: amaranth, barley, bulgur, buckwheat, cornmeal, millet, oatmeal, quinoa, steel cut oats, rye, teff, wheatberries, brown or wild rice
- Popcorn kernels (not microwave popcorn)

Fruits & Vegetables

- All canned vegetables (low sodium, no added sugar)
- All canned fruits (light syrup, canned in its own juice)
- Unsweetened applesauce
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice (no added sugars or sweeteners, low sodium, no added salt)
- 100% dried fruit (no sugar added preferred)

Lean Proteins

- Canned tuna, chicken, or salmon (canned in water preferred)
- Canned/dry beans or lentils (no added sodium or reduced sodium)
- Nuts or seeds (unsalted, no added sugar)
- Nut or seed butters (no added sugar, no partially hydrogenated oils)

Dairy

- Low-fat (1% or less) powdered or shelf-stable boxed milk
- Milk alternatives: Shelf-stable soy or almond milk (unsweetened, fortified with calcium and vitamin D)

Other

- Reduced sodium or unsalted broth, stock or bouillon
- Beverages: Coffee, unsweetened tea
- Oils: Olive, canola, sesame, cooking sprays
- Soup: Low-sodium or reduced sodium canned, dried, or frozen soup mixes
- Condiments: Dried herbs and spices, unsalted seasoning mixes, (balsamic) vinegars, Mrs. Dash® seasoning blends and marinades

Personal care items

include but are not limited to:

- Deodorant
- Facial cleanser
- Men's and women's disposable razors and shaving gel or cream
- Sanitary pads or tampons
- Shampoo or conditioner
- Soap (bar or liquid)
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouthwash, dental floss
- Lotion
- Sunscreen

Please do not donate:

- Foods that you would not eat yourself
- Home-canned or homemade goods
- Opened, damaged or expired items
- Perishable items like breads, produce, fresh meat and butter
- Perishable potato or chicken salad

Soup Kitchen Wish List

Our soup kitchen is striving to improve the nutritional quality of our meals by reducing sodium and sugar and by increasing fiber content. Please help us accomplish our goals by donating the following much-needed items:

- **Whole-wheat** pasta
- Brown rice or wild rice
- Dried beans or lentils
- **Low-sodium** canned beans (black beans, pinto beans, etc.)
- Whole grains—quinoa, couscous, barley, etc.
- **Low-sodium** canned vegetables*
- Canned fruit—**in 100% juice***
- Boxed potatoes
- Spices of any kind
- Flour & cornstarch
- Cooking oils & vinegars

* These foods may be available in #10 size cans (109 ounces), which are more convenient for large-batch cooking.

Thank you very much for your donation!

References

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Handouts

The following handouts can be helpful in educating staff, volunteers and clients.

Sodium

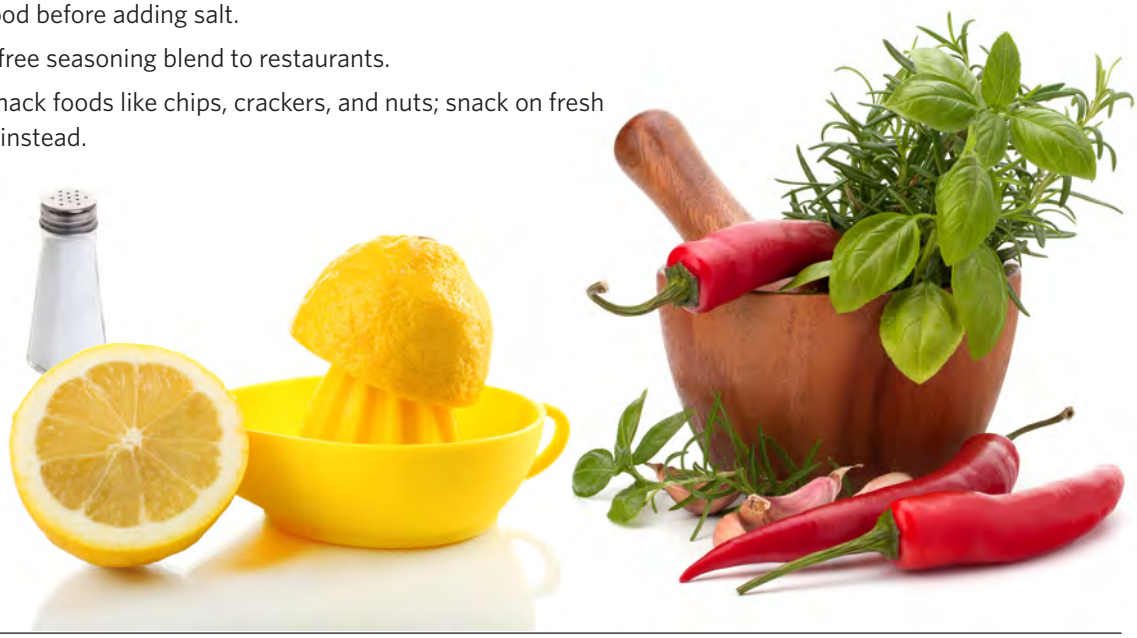
The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 recommends that everyone above the age of 2 years consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. Adults 51 years or older, African Americans, and those with high blood pressure, chronic kidney disease, or diabetes should limit sodium intake to 1,500 mg per day.

Too much sodium raises blood pressure and increases the risk for heart attack and stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease and stroke combined kill more Americans each year than any other cause.

Since 1 tsp of salt equals 2,300 mg of sodium, you should avoid adding salt to your food. But even so, you may still be eating too much sodium. Many of the foods you buy contain sodium, and the majority of sodium in the American diet comes from processed and restaurant food, not from the salt shaker.

How to decrease sodium:

- Ask for no added salt at restaurants.
- Keep dressings and sauces on the side.
- Use only half of the sauces included in packaged products like frozen vegetables or pastas.
- Buy salt-free seasonings or make your own seasoning blends.
- Use fresh herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Buy low-sodium or unsalted canned foods.
- Try fresh poultry, fish, and pork instead of cured, canned, smoked, or processed meats.
- Avoid instant pasta and rice mixes with seasoning packets. Create your own seasoning for plain rice and pasta, or use only half of the packet.
- Read labels to know how much sodium is in your food.
- Look up nutrition information for restaurants ahead of time, if available.
- Always measure the salt in recipes so that you don't add too much; it's usually required for good rising in baking, but can be left out of other recipes.
- Lemon juice, lime juice, and vinegar can bring out the flavor of food naturally, so you won't need the salt.
- Always taste your food before adding salt.
- Bring your own salt-free seasoning blend to restaurants.
- Limit high-sodium snack foods like chips, crackers, and nuts; snack on fresh fruit and vegetables instead.



Sugar

Reducing the amount of sugar you eat can help you control your weight and possibly help you avoid serious diet-related health problems such as heart disease and diabetes.

Sugar is found naturally in foods like fruit and milk. Sugar is added to foods in processing and preparation. Basically, "added sugar" includes everything from the sugar you add to your own food and drinks to the sweeteners added by the manufacturer to products like cola, yogurt, or pasta sauce. This makes it very important to read labels and know where the sugar in your diet comes from.

Read the ingredients:

Label reading is not as simple as looking for the word "sugar" alone. Sweeteners can be found under nearly 60 different names. Here are some of the most common ones to help you search for sugar on the label yourself:

agave nectar	evaporated cane juice	lactose
brown sugar	fructose	malt sugar
cane crystals	fruit juice concentrate	maltose
cane sugar	glucose	maple syrup
corn sweetener	high-fructose corn syrup	molasses
crystalline fructose	honey	raw sugar
dextrose	invert sugar	sucrose

The American Heart Association recommends that **women limit added sugar intake to 24 g (6 tsp) per day,** and total sugar (natural and added) to about 48 g per day. **For men, the amount of added sugars is limited to 36 g (9 tsp) per day** and total sugar to about 72 g per day. By reading the Nutrition Facts panel, you will find out how much sugar is found in the food and drinks you choose.

Women

Men

Whole Grains

Whole-grain foods contain the entire grain kernel (the bran, germ, and endosperm). This means that 100% of the grain kernel needs to be present to be a whole grain. Whole grains are a good source of fiber, minerals, antioxidants, vitamin E, and B vitamins. Removing any part off the grain can reduce the content of these vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Foods with partial grains are often called "enriched."

Serving Sizes of Whole Grains:

USDA guidelines define a serving as any of the following amounts, for products where all the grain ingredients are whole grains:

½ cup cooked rice, bulgur, pasta, or cooked cereal
1 oz. dry pasta, rice, or other dry grain
1 slice bread
1 small muffin (weighing 1 oz.)
1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes

Whole grain foods:

brown rice	whole-grain barley
buckwheat	whole-grain corn
bulgur	whole-grain sorghum
millet	whole-grain triticale
oatmeal	whole oats
quinoa	whole rye
rolled oats	whole wheat
wild rice	

- Look for the phrase "whole grain" in the ingredient list; it should be one of the first ingredients listed.
- Brown color does not always mean whole grain; coloring can come from molasses or other added ingredients.
- Whole-grain foods are often higher in fiber, but not always—remember to read the label.
- Foods labeled "multi-grain," "stone-ground," "100% wheat," "cracked wheat," "seven-grain," or "bran" are misleading and not always whole-grain products; check the ingredient list.

Adding whole grains to your diet:

- Substitute whole grains for enriched grain foods; consider switching from white bread and pasta to whole-wheat varieties
- Try substituting whole-wheat or oat flour for up to half the white flour in recipes; you may need more leavening agent
- Add grains to soups or stews
- Add oats to meatballs, burgers, or meatloaf
- Try new whole-grain salads like tabbouleh
- Experiment with new recipes that include grains like bulgur, wheat berries, or quinoa

Healthy Fats

A healthy diet includes good fats like omega-3 and monounsaturated fats (listed below). These help to lower the risk of several diseases, like diabetes and heart disease. Be sure to limit unhealthy fats, including trans fats from processed foods and saturated fats from animal products.

Omega-3's are polyunsaturated fats that help to lower cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure, and are beneficial for heart and brain health. They are essential because the body can't make them; they must be obtained from the food we eat.

- Fatty fish—salmon, albacore tuna (fresh and canned), sardines, lake trout, and mackerel
- Walnuts and walnut oil
- Flaxseed, chia seeds
- Eggs
- Dark, leafy greens

Monounsaturated fats improve cholesterol levels, which can decrease your risk of heart disease and stroke. Oils rich in monounsaturated fats also provide a good source of the antioxidant vitamin E, which protects body tissue from damage.

- Nuts
- Avocado
- Olives
- Peanut butter or other nut butters
- Plant oils—olive, peanut, sesame, safflower, canola

Adding healthy fats to your diet:

- Add nuts, olives, or avocado to salads.
- Make homemade salad dressing with olive oil, or try other oils such as walnut or almond.
- Add ground flax seeds or chia seeds to smoothies, baked goods, yogurt, or oatmeal.
- Experiment with different oils for cooking; use olive oil for Italian cooking, peanut or sesame oil for Asian flavors.
- Have nuts for a snack.
- Eat fatty fish twice a week.
- Add peanut butter to apples, oatmeal, or smoothies.

Eat More Fruits & Vegetables

Important nutrients:

- Fruits and vegetables are important sources of many vitamins and minerals, including potassium, fiber, folic acid, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron.
- Fiber from fruits and vegetables can lower cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber contributes to proper bowel function and helps reduce constipation and diverticulosis. High-fiber foods, such as fruits and vegetables, help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories.
- Potassium helps maintain healthy blood pressure.
- Folic acid helps the body form red blood cells.
- Vitamin A contributes to eye and skin health and protects against infections.
- Vitamin C helps heal wounds, keeps teeth and gums healthy, and aids in iron absorption.

Health benefits:

- Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and can help you achieve or maintain a healthy weight.
- Increasing vegetables and fruits may reduce risk for heart disease, including heart attack and stroke.
- Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables may protect against certain types of cancers.
- Diets high in fiber, with the help of vegetables and fruits, may reduce the risk of heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes.
- Choosing potassium-rich vegetables and fruits helps lower blood pressure, may also reduce the risk of developing kidney stones, and helps to decrease bone loss.

Increasing fruits and vegetables in your diet:

- Plan meals around vegetables as the main dish, such as stir fry or vegetable soup.
- Keep a container of cut-up vegetables in the refrigerator to snack on or to quickly add to salads.
- Add vegetables to pizza, pasta dishes, and casseroles.
- Use vegetable purées to thicken sauces and stews; use them in baking.
- Keep a bowl of fruit on the counter, or keep cut-up fruit in the refrigerator so it's easy to grab as a snack.
- Add fruit to yogurt, cereal, and milk or oatmeal.
- Use fruit on salads, pizzas, or kabobs.
- Put fruits and vegetables in smoothies.
- Cover half your plate with fruit and vegetables at each meal.

Fiber

Dietary fiber refers to parts of plant foods that your body can't digest and absorb. There are two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fiber dissolves in water and turns into a gel. Good sources are oats, barley, beans, peas, apples, citrus fruits, psyllium, bran, flax, carrots, berries, and nuts.

Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water. Good sources are whole grains, vegetables, bran, nuts, beans, potatoes, and seeds.

Health benefits of a high-fiber diet:

- Helps maintain bowel health—decreases the chance of constipation, helps the movement of material through the digestive tract, decreases the risk of hemorrhoids and diverticular disease.
- Lowers cholesterol levels—soluble fiber may help lower your LDL or "bad" cholesterol levels and also reduce blood pressure and inflammation.
- Helps control blood sugar levels—fiber slows the absorption of sugar, which improves blood sugar levels.
- Helps maintain a healthy weight—high-fiber meals help you feel full with a smaller amount of calories, and you have that satisfied feeling for a longer period of time, so you are less likely to overeat.

Daily fiber needs:

	Age 50 or younger	Age 50 or older
Men	38 g	30 g
Women	25 g	21 g

Increasing fiber in your diet:

- Make sure your breakfast cereal has 5 g of fiber or more per serving.
- Switch to breads, pasta, crackers, etc., that are made from whole grains instead of white flour.
- Snack on raw fruits, vegetables, and nuts.
- Substitute legumes for meat a few times a week in soups, stew, pasta dishes, or salads.
- Make a yogurt parfait with flaxseeds and fresh fruit.
- Experiment with different grains like barley, wheat berries, or quinoa.

Lean Protein

Lean proteins include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, and seeds. They provide protein, B vitamins (niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, and B6), vitamin E, iron, zinc, and magnesium.

Serving size:

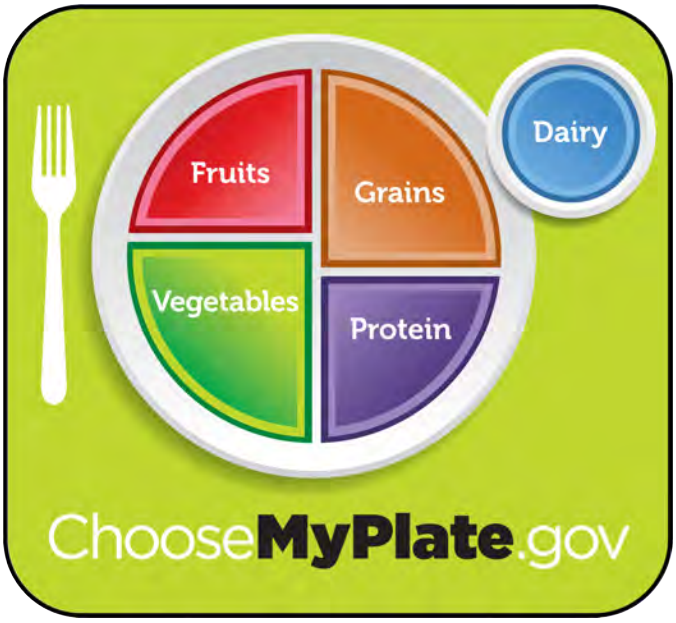
1 oz. meat, poultry, or fish, ¼ cup cooked beans, 1 egg, 1 tbsp peanut butter, and ½ oz. nuts or seeds are considered a 1-ounce serving equivalent

Most Americans eat enough protein, but should focus on leaner choices and a variety of types of protein.

Lean protein choices in your diet:

- Always buy the leanest cuts of beef, pork, turkey, and chicken to avoid excess saturated fat and cholesterol.
- Buy skinless chicken or remove the skin before cooking.
- Buy leaner luncheon meat instead of meats like bologna or salami with excess fat and sodium.
- Trim fat from meat before cooking.
- Use lean cooking methods such as grilling, roasting, or broiling.
- Drain away fat from cooking.
- Avoid using breading, sauces, or gravies.
- Choose seafood rich in omega-3's such as salmon, trout, and mackerel.
- Choose legumes as a main dish for an alternative source of protein.
- Add nuts to salads or main dishes.

My Plate



Build a healthy plate:

- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Try and eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, such as dark green, orange, and red.
- Use skim or 1% milk, which has the same amount of calcium and essential nutrients as whole milk, but less fat and fewer calories.
- Make sure at least half of the grains you choose are whole grains.
- Eat beans for a good source of protein and fiber.
- Make sure you choose lean proteins and keep your serving sizes small.
- Choose water over sugary drinks.
- Eat fruit for dessert more often than sugary desserts.
- Be aware of the sodium content in the foods you purchase.
- Practice portion control.

Label Reading

USE THE NUTRITION FACTS LABEL TO EAT HEALTHIER

Check the serving size and number of servings.

- The Nutrition Facts Label information is based on ONE serving, but many packages contain more. Look at the serving size and how many servings you are actually consuming. If you double the servings you eat, you double the calories and nutrients, including the % DVs.
- When you compare calories and nutrients between brands, check to see if the serving size is the same.

Calories count, so pay attention to the amount.

- This is where you'll find the number of calories per serving and the calories from fat in each serving.
- Fat-free doesn't mean calorie-free. Lower fat items may have as many calories as full-fat versions.
- If the label lists that 1 serving equals 3 cookies and 100 calories, and you eat 6 cookies, you've eaten 2 servings, or twice the number of calories and fat.

Look for foods that are rich in these nutrients.

- Use the label not only to limit fat and sodium, but also to increase nutrients that promote good health and may protect you from disease.
- Some Americans don't get enough vitamins A and C, potassium, calcium, and iron, so choose the brand with the higher % DV for these nutrients.
- Get the most nutrition for your calories—compare the calories to the nutrients you would be getting to make a healthier food choice.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Potassium 700mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

* 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

The % Daily Value is a key to a balanced diet.

The % DV is a general guide to help you link nutrients in a serving of food to their contribution to your total daily diet. It can help you determine if a food is high or low in a nutrient—5% or less is low, 20% or more is high. You can use the % DV to make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. The * is a reminder that the % DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. You may need more or less, but the % DV is still a helpful gauge.

Know your fats and reduce sodium for your health.

- To help reduce your risk of heart disease, use the label to select foods that are lowest in saturated fat, *trans* fat and cholesterol.
- *Trans* fat doesn't have a % DV, but consume as little as possible because it increases your risk of heart disease.
- The % DV for total fat includes all different kinds of fats.
- To help lower blood cholesterol, replace saturated and *trans* fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in fish, nuts, and liquid vegetable oils.
- Limit sodium to help reduce your risk of high blood pressure.

Reach for healthy, wholesome carbohydrates.

- Fiber and sugars are types of carbohydrates. Healthy sources, like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains, can reduce the risk of heart disease and improve digestive functioning.
- Whole grain foods can't always be identified by color or name, such as multi-grain or wheat. Look for the "whole" grain listed first in the ingredient list, such as whole wheat, brown rice, or whole oats.
- There isn't a % DV for sugar, but you can compare the sugar content in grams among products.
- Limit foods with added sugars (sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn or maple syrup), which add calories but not other nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few items in the ingredients list.

For protein, choose foods that are lower in fat.

- Most Americans get plenty of protein, but not always from the healthiest sources.
- When choosing a food for its protein content, such as meat, poultry, dry beans, milk and milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat, or fat free.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture

Notes

Notes

The information and resources in this guide were compiled by Amy VanFossen, RD, Spectrum Health Healthier Communities, Heartside Nutrition Project, December 2015.

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