

Food Parcel and Meal Provision

A document to support organisations with food parcels and meal provisions within their community



 Western Health
and Social Care Trust

 Public Health
Agency

 **Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

 **Derry City & Strabane
District Council**
Comhairle
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Introduction

During these unprecedented times and those that lie ahead following the Covid-19 pandemic the Western Health and Social Care Trust Community Food and Nutrition Team in partnership with Derry City and Strabane District Council have put together this short document containing information to assist when buying food and/ or making up or preparing food parcels for those within your community who may need additional support.

We would also like to acknowledge Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in assisting with the provision of this information alongside Causeway Coast and Glens District Council and Fermanagh Omagh District Council for their support in promoting this document.

This information will be useful for community and voluntary sector organisations who are providing some level of meal or food provision within their local area.

Within this document information can be found on items to include in food parcels, tips to make food parcels healthier where possible, vegetarian and vegan diets, food choices for religious faiths and food safety advice for both the general public and community/voluntary sector organisations.

In addition to this guide, the Community Food and Nutrition Team can also provide the 'Making the most of your food parcel' resource and recipe book.

The Community Food and Nutrition work closely with community, voluntary and statutory organisations throughout the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT) area to provide information, training and support. We work to increase knowledge around nutrition to help build capacity and increase confidence in making more informed nutrition decisions to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Our work involves very practical training and support to encourage individuals and their families to develop basic cooking, budgeting and shopping skills to ensure best nutritional value for money.

This document aims to help volunteers/ workers who are involved in making up food parcels by giving a brief overview of the following;

- Helpful food and drink items to include in food parcels for everyone
- Simple suggestions for improving the nutritional balance of food parcels
- Accurate information on what should or should not be included in parcels for those individuals with dietary restrictions due to cultural or religious reasons
- Simple recipes and recipe video instructions

If anyone you are assisting follows a Medically Prescribed diet* it is important that they continue to do so. For foods included/excluded specific to these clients they should speak to their health care professional with any queries in relation to this.

We are aware that some individuals choose themselves to restrict their diet, by excluding certain allergens like gluten, milk etc. Advice is not provided for these individuals.

*** Medically prescribed diets**

A medically prescribed diet is one that has been prescribed by a doctor i.e. general practitioner (GP) or a hospital doctor. In some circumstances, diet may be the only treatment of a medical condition or can form a major part of it. These diets can be required for a wide variety of medical conditions.

Below is an outline of a number of Lifelong conditions requiring specific dietary input;

Type 1 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, Secondary Diabetes, Coeliac disease, Crohn's disease, pancreatic insufficiency, cardiac conditions requiring low fat or low salt diets, and cystic fibrosis, are classified as lifelong conditions.

Renal disorders if any of the following is required fluid restriction, salt restriction, potassium restriction, phosphate restrictions and modifications to the amount of dietary protein and energy.

Texture modified diets – Requested by Speech and language Therapists (SALTs) i.e. where the foods or drinks are required to be made smoother or thicker than normal

Ketogenic diet for specific medical conditions, where the medical evidence has shown benefit

Food allergies

Food intolerance

Inherited Metabolic Disorders: – E.g. PKU (phenylketonuria), Galactosaemia , HCU (homocystineuria), , MSUD (Maple Syrup Urine Disease)

High Energy Diet for those who have lost weight due to an underlying medical condition

Low Fibre Diet for those with bowel complaints

Obesity – if the client has been referred to Nutrition and Dietetics in the last 12 months or Prader-Willi syndrome

For individuals with any type of Diabetes with concerns about COVID 19, the volunteer and/or client can contact the regional COVID 19 Diabetes Helpline – 02895360600 (7 days per week 9am–3 pm)

Vegetarian and Vegan Diets

This information may be used when preparing emergency food parcels. Where possible, it is always best to ask the individual what dietary restrictions they follow however we are aware that meeting some of these restrictions may not always be possible.

Vegetarian and vegan diets, now commonly known as 'plant-based diets', are those diets which are based on foods which come from plants, including vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, seeds and fruits, with few or no animal products.

Types of plant-based diets include:

Lacto-Ovo Vegetarians

Eat dairy foods and eggs but not meat, poultry or seafood.

Ovo Vegetarians

Include eggs but avoid all other animal foods, including dairy.

Lacto- Vegetarians

Eat dairy foods but exclude eggs, meat, poultry and seafood.

Vegans

Do not eat any animal products at all. This include honey, dairy and eggs. Many shop bought ready-made products may contain animal ingredients.

Other variations of plant-based diets include:

Pescetarians: Eat fish and/or shellfish

Semi-vegetarians/ Flexitarians: Occasionally eat meat or poultry

Information adapted from 'Plant-based diet: Food Fact Sheet', British Dietetic Association, 2017.

Food Choices for Religious Faiths

This guide may be used when preparing emergency food parcels. It is important to ask the individual what, if any, dietary restrictions they are following. This can vary widely between different denominations, families and individuals.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Buddhist</u></p> <p>Many are vegetarian and some may be vegan. Therefore check whether individual eats meat, poultry, fish, dairy foods and eggs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sikh</u></p> <p>Beef, and beef products, halal and Kosher meats are typically avoided.</p> <p>Many are vegetarian therefore check whether meat, poultry, fish and eggs are eaten.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Jewish</u></p> <p>Typically, beef, lamb, poultry and fish must be Kosher.</p> <p>Kosher refers to foods that have been selected and prepared according to particular rules of the Jewish religion.</p> <p>Pork and pork products, shellfish and seafood without fins and scales are typically avoided.</p> <p>Many also exclude gelatine and other ingredients that have come from animals that are not Kosher.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Muslim</u></p> <p>Many practising Muslims will only eat halal beef, lamb, poultry and fish.</p> <p>Halal meat is from animals that have been killed according to Muslim law.</p> <p>Pork and pork products, shellfish and seafood without fins and scales are typically avoided.</p> <p>Some individuals may also avoid eating gelatine and other ingredients from animals that are not halal.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Hindu</u></p> <p>Beef and beef products are typically avoided.</p> <p>Many are vegetarian therefore check whether individual eats meat, poultry, fish and eggs.</p> <p>Strict Hindus also avoid eating fat that has come from an animal source e.g. butter. They also avoid onions, garlic, mushrooms, tea and coffee.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Rastafarian</u></p> <p>Pork and pork products are typically avoided.</p> <p>Many are vegetarian or vegan therefore check whether individual eats meat, poultry, fish, dairy and eggs.</p> <p>Many prefer to eat a pure and natural diet so may exclude coffee, tea, processed or canned and non-organic foods.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Seventh Day Adventist</u></p> <p>Many are vegetarian and some may be vegan, therefore check whether they eat meat, poultry, fish and eggs.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Individuals may also exclude tea and coffee.</p>	

Information adapted from 'Guidance on food for religious faiths, Public Health Agency, 2009.

Suggested Items to Include in Emergency Food Parcels

Starchy Foods

Porridge Crackers
Cereal Longer life bread
Rice Instant Mashed potato
Noodles Tinned potatoes
Pasta/ Spaghetti/ Lasagne Sheets

Protein Rich Foods

Tinned or dried beans e.g. kidney beans/ chickpeas/ mixed beans/ cannellini beans/ butter beans/ black beans.
Baked beans/ spaghetti in tomato sauce
Tinned or dried lentils
Tinned fish e.g. tuna, mackerel, sardines, salmon
Tinned meat/ chicken

Soups and Sauces

Tinned soup Jars of pasta sauces e.g. tomato/ pesto
Jars/ packets of curry/ chilli sauce etc.

Drinks

UHT fruit juice
Diluting juice
Instant coffee
Tea bags
Hot chocolate powder

Fruit and Vegetables

Tinned fruit e.g. pears/ apples/ pineapple
Tinned vegetables e.g. carrots/ sweetcorn/peas
Tinned or cartons of chopped tomatoes

Dairy

UHT long life milk
Tinned custard
Tinned rice pudding
Custard powder

Fresh Items (When possible to include)

Milk Potatoes
Eggs Yoghurt
Poultry/ Meat Cheese
Fresh fruit and vegetables Butter/ Low fat spread
Bread/ Pitta/ Wraps/ Bagels/ Pancakes

Snack Ideas

Plain biscuits e.g. rich tea/ digestive/ oat/ malted milk

Oatcakes and rice cakes

Baked crisps, bread sticks and popcorn

Unsalted nuts and dried fruit mix

Where possible the following budget friendly ingredients could also be included within food parcels to help make the food go further and to add more flavour and variety to meals.

Cooking Ingredients

Cooking Oil e.g. vegetable/ rapeseed/
olive/ groundnut oil

Tomato Puree

Stock Cubes e.g. vegetable/ chicken/
beef

Herbs and Spices

Pepper

Garlic powder/ Puree

Mixed dried herbs

Mixed spice/ curry powder

Baking

Flour e.g. plain/ self-raising/ wholemeal

Sugar e.g. Caster/ brown

Condiments

Peanut butter

Honey

Marmalade

Jam

Simple ways to make food parcels healthier

We appreciate that many food parcels are made on limited budgets and with limited choice of food and drink items. However where possible it is important to try to provide a range of nutritious food and drink items.

Keep these simple points in mind to help you choose healthier options:

Choose fruit tinned in its own juice or water rather than sugary syrup.

Choose vegetables tinned in unsalted water rather than those tinned in brine or salted water.

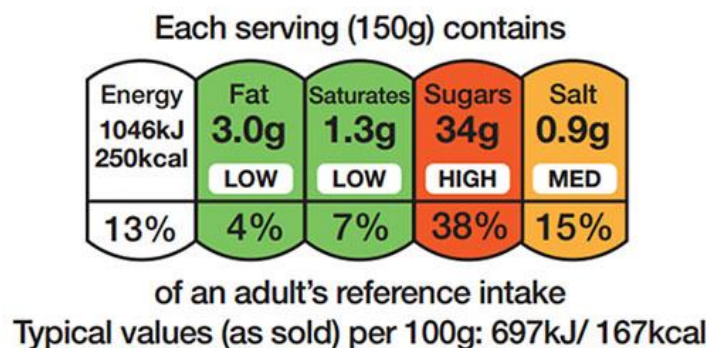
Choose fish tinned in spring water, sunflower oil or sauce such as tomato/ barbeque/ curry, rather than brine.

Choose reduced sugar and salt baked beans and tinned spaghetti.

When buying starchy foods such as cereals, bread, pasta and rice, try to include wholegrain and wholemeal versions.

For items such as cereal, soups, tinned meats, tinned meals and sauces, have a look at the food label to help you pick those items that are lower in fat, sugar and salt.

Most will have a colour- coded front of pack label like this one-



Simply try to pick products with more greens and ambers, and fewer reds.

Food Safety Advice for Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations around food provision

Food handlers operating as a charity, community group or business all have a duty of care to keep food safe. The following advice is intended to assist those who are using an existing community group or setting up a new community group, to provide food for people who are in need.

It is advised that food handlers speak to the Food Safety Team within their local council area to discuss the proposed food activity so that they may offer support and guidance.

Foods should be handled as little as possible to prevent the spread of food borne illness. This guidance provides advice to ensure the provision of safe food to the public, in order to reduce the risk of food poisoning and to reduce the spread of infection. If more information on either food safety or infection control procedures is required please contact the Food Safety Team within your local council.

Infection Control

Scientific advice states it is very unlikely that COVID-19 can be spread through food, but it can be spread easily between people so the advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone.

The Government have issued guidance on COVID-19 for **food businesses** which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Anyone who is unwell or with family members self-isolating should NOT be involved in any food activities.

To reduce the spread of Coronavirus and to reduce the risk of food poisoning, it is imperative that regular handwashing is carried out. Wash hands thoroughly before going shopping and returning from shopping, preparing food, after handling raw meat, visiting the toilet, coughing or sneezing, touching pets or any other activity which could lead to hands being contaminated. Hand drying also plays an important role in hand hygiene, therefore use kitchen roll and thoroughly dry your hands.

Donations

To ensure that all donated food received is safe for consumption and does not pose a risk to health, consider the following:

- Food donations should only be considered from businesses which have obtained a Food Hygiene Rating following an inspection from the relevant District Council. The Food Hygiene Rating reflects the standards of Food Hygiene found on the date of the inspection and can be accessed via <https://ratings.food.gov.uk/>
- Before receiving goods, consider capacity for storage, temperature control and transportation of foods
- Liaise with the food donor to ensure the suitability of donations
- Keep records of where food donations have been obtained from to ensure traceability in case of any problems. Food product recalls can occur at any time and you must be able to recall food or remove food from the supply chain that has been deemed unsafe to eat

Purchasing Food/ Receiving Donations

- Make sure that the food is properly labelled with instructions such as use-by dates, allergen information and storage guidelines
- Do not purchase/discard badly damaged canned foods
- Try to buy chilled or frozen foods last and pack them all together, preferably in a cool bag
- Make sure that raw foods are kept apart from ready to eat foods
- Take chilled foods straight to designated storage facility and be careful not leave food in the car for too long
- If donations are received with a short shelf life remaining it can be frozen before the end of use by dates. The date the food is frozen should be recorded and the food should now be given a best before date i.e. how long can the product remain frozen for (refer to information on packaging). Ensure the food is cooked/consumed within 24 hours of defrosting.

Refrigeration

- Fridges should operate between 0 and 8°C, do not overload it as this will impair its efficiency
- Make sure foods with a 'use by' date are kept chilled
- Food should be kept covered in the fridge in suitable 'food grade' containers
- Store raw meat at the bottom of your fridge to prevent drips falling onto other food

Defrosting

- Make sure meat and poultry have been fully defrosted before cooking
- It is recommended that food is defrosted in the fridge, not at than room temperature or by under hot/cold running water as these practices encourage the growth and spread of food poisoning bacteria
- Use food within one to two days after it's been defrosted – it will go off in the same way as if it was fresh

Preparation

- Ensure that food preparation areas are suitably cleaned and sanitised before and after use. To sanitise work surface, first wash with hot soapy water and then use an antibacterial spray. Leave the spray on the surface for the length of time advised by the manufacturer/supplier
- Ideally use kitchen roll to wipe down the work surface
- Where possible separate knives and chopping boards should be used for raw and cooked meats and vegetables. Where this is not possible knives and chopping boards should be cleaned and thoroughly disinfected between handling each type of food, preferably in a dishwasher
- Do not wash meat or poultry
- Dirty, damp cloths and tea cloths are a breeding ground for bacteria. Make sure they are washed in a boil wash and let them dry before using them again
- Keep different cloths for different jobs, this helps stop germs spreading around the kitchen. Or use disposable kitchen towels to clean worktops and chopping boards
- Wash cloths in the washing machine, on the boil wash

- Keep pets away from areas where food is being prepared

Cooking

- Cook food thoroughly and ensure that food is piping hot all the way through
- Make sure that the centre of meat and poultry is well cooked and the juices run clear

Cooling and Reheating

- If large quantities of food are intended to be cooked, cooled and then reheated, it is important to cool the food quickly
- To cool food quickly, divide the food item into smaller amounts
- A large batch or stew can be divided into a number of smaller containers
- Joints of beef or chicken can be sliced while still warm and portioned
- Do not leave the cooling food in a warm kitchen. Place the food in a cool, clean area initially and then place in the refrigerator within 2 hours
- Do not keep food for longer than two days
- Rice should not be kept for longer than 24 hours and should only be reheated once. When food is reheated, make sure that it is steaming hot all the way through. If the food is only warm it might not be safe to eat
- Do not reheat food more than once

Transporting Food

- When providing food in containers, it is important to select appropriate food grade packaging. This will make sure that the transported food is safe and its quality is maintained
- Foods that need refrigerating must be kept cool while they are being transported. These meals may need to be packed in an insulated box or a cool bag with ice packs
- If transporting hot food, it should be kept hot. This may need to be packed in an insulated box. It is recommended to keep distances short and times limited to within 30 minutes
- It is safe to re-use glass and plastic containers, as long as they are free from chips and cracks

- Any returned containers should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to re-use cleaned to prevent cross-contamination with germs, allergens and physical contaminants. Upon collection such returned items should be placed in a dedicated tray/box for transport back to the base premises

Food Allergy and Safety

Cooking for someone with a food allergy or intolerance can be worrying if you are not used to doing it. Plan a safe meal by:

- Asking what they can and cannot eat
- Making sure allergens are kept separate from other foods to avoid cross-contamination
- Double-checking the ingredients lists on prepacked foods for allergen information
- Checking the ingredients with the person who provided the food, if it was donated
- Avoiding adding toppings or garnishes to dishes which might otherwise appear allergen-free
- Cleaning work surfaces and equipment thoroughly to remove traces of anything which might have been cooked before

There are often good substitutes available for ingredients that someone may need to avoid. Do not hesitate to ask for help and suggestions for ingredients from those with a food allergy that you are cooking for.

For further information on Allergens see:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

Delivery

- Limiting contact when delivering orders will prevent the spread of germs
- Do not enter customers' properties and keep as far away from customers as is possible when handing over the food
- Consider leaving deliveries at the door of the customer, rather than handing it over to them
- Knock on the door and step back at least 2 metres and wait for your customer to collect it. Please follow Government advice on social distancing at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for->

- Avoid possible cross-contamination risks in the delivery process. This can be done through packaging meals securely and storing allergen-free meals separately in transit, to avoid contamination through any spillages
- If an allergen-free meal has been requested, it should be clear when delivered which container it is in. Use stickers or a note on the container to label each meal

During this difficult time, we will continue to support and provide guidance to all businesses providing food. Should you wish to discuss any matter with a member of a Food Team, please do not hesitate to contact your local council.

Volunteers assisting with food deliveries to vulnerable and older persons

The following advice is to be followed by volunteers assisting with food deliveries to vulnerable and older persons. Each volunteer should also have regard to the most up-to-date advice available below;

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus#situation-in-northern-ireland>

Collection of Food Parcels

- When collecting food parcels, use alcohol hand sanitiser on arrival at premises and put on disposable gloves before exiting your vehicle
- Make yourself known to the Food Business Operator ensuring you are social distancing by maintaining a distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) from other people
- Complete the visit to collect the goods without delay
- Once all goods are safely within your vehicle, remove your disposable gloves and ensure you have a bag in the vehicle to safely dispose of used gloves. Use alcohol hand sanitiser to clean your hands in your vehicle before you depart to deliver the goods

Arrival at Persons Home

- Where possible a safe place for delivery of food parcel should have been agreed with the householder, ideally at the front door-step to minimise contact with surfaces
- On arrival use hand sanitiser and put on disposable gloves before exiting your vehicle
- Remove your disposable gloves before you return to your vehicle and ensure you have a bag in the vehicle to safely dispose of used gloves
- Call contact number provided by the retailer/caterer to inform the householder that the parcel is in safe place as agreed
- Use alcohol hand sanitiser to clean your hands in your vehicle before you depart
- When deliveries are complete clean steering wheel and all hand contact surfaces with disposable alcohol wipes

General advice

- Wash your hands with soap and water often (for at least 20 seconds) and in particular on returning to the office or to home
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- Implement social distancing
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Food Safety Advice for the General Public

As a result of the current COVID-19 situation, we understand that people will have concerns regarding the safety of their food so we have put together this guidance document to give you advice to relieve your worries and offer some practical advice on how to handle your food safely.

Is there a risk to consumers from 'open' food?

It is important to maintain good hygiene practices around open food (e.g. unpackaged bread, cakes etc.). However, it is possible that infected food workers and/or consumers could introduce the virus to food, by coughing and sneezing, or through hand contact. It is therefore important that everyone follows good personal hygiene practices. Customers and food businesses are expected to behave in a hygienic manner and food business are obliged to monitor such displays.

Can the general public donate food?

All supermarkets have donating boxes for vulnerable groups which can be used by customers.

We would suggest that members of the public avoiding preparing and cooking food items for donation.

Should food handlers in businesses be wearing gloves?

We are not encouraging food businesses to rely on the use of gloves (unless a food handler has a cut or injury). There is no substitute for regular and thorough handwashing.

Should I check the dates on the packaging of foods that I've bought?

As with all foods the "first in first out" rule applies, using the food with the shortest date first. This this can be helped by writing the durability date on the side of products in larger text.

Should I date food in the freezer?

Look at the packaging to check whether it is suitable for freezing and how long it should be frozen for. Ensure food is frozen before the use by or best before date

All foods should be adequately wrapped before placing them in the freezer and you may find it helpful to write on the food the date the food should be used by

Ensure all food is thoroughly defrosted before cooking, all food should be defrosted in the fridge ideally overnight.

Leftovers from batch cooking can be frozen for up to 3 months. Ensure all food is cooled before placing in your freezer.

What's the difference between a Best Before Date (BBE) and Use By Date?

Watch out for use-by dates - these dates appear on foods which are likely to go off quickly. Once past the use-by date bacteria may have multiplied to levels that will make you feel ill if you then eat the food. Unlike use-by dates, best before dates are about food quality. Eating foods after the best-before date won't make you ill but you may find that the food starts to lose its texture or flavour.

Charitable organisations and local restaurants/grocers have been doing great work and have been arranging for food parcel deliveries. Please still check dates to ensure that any food provided to you is safe and don't assume its ok. If refrigerated put it into the fridge straight away.

It's best to take delivery at the door and avoid direct contact with the person delivering it, remember the social distancing rules. Wash and sanitise hands after handling the bag and dealing with the person.

For security and hygiene reasons prevent anyone who is delivering foods from entering your house.

Western Health and Social Care Trust Local Council Contact Details

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For further nutrition information and recipe books please contact:

The Community Food and Nutrition Team

Telephone: 0287 136 5127

Email: health.improvement@westerntrust.hscni.net

Further Information

For helpful advice and ideas for healthy eating check out

<https://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating.aspx>

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/eatwell-guide>

A range of recipe ideas and suggestions may be found at:

<https://www.choosetolivebetter.com/content/healthy-recipes>

<https://www.safefood.eu/Recipes.aspx>

Some of these recipes are also linked to video instructions- see below:

<https://www.safefood.eu/Recipes/Breakfast/Porridge.aspx>

<https://www.safefood.eu/Recipes/Lunch/Omelette.aspx>

<https://www.safefood.eu/Recipes/Dinner/Homemade-burgers.aspx>

Food Safety

Further advice on **Food safety for community cooking and food banks** has been produced by the Food Standards Agency and can be accessed at

<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks>

Advice on Covid-19 can be found on the Public Health Agency website at

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

And further food safety guidance can be found on our Derry City & Strabane District Council website at

<https://www.derrystrabane.com/environmentalhealth/food> and the Food Standards Agency website at www.food.gov.uk
