

Food Pantry Donation Guide



How to Use this Guide

The recommendations in this guide are based on the Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System, also called HER Guidelines.

When choosing what foods to donate, these guidelines look at nutrition labels like the one to the right. Specifically:

- **Saturated Fat**
- **Sodium**
- **Added Sugar**

If Added Sugar isn't available, use **Total Sugar instead

With the HER Guidelines, foods are sorted into 3 categories, **"Choose Often,"** **"Choose Sometimes,"** and **"Choose Rarely"** based on this information.

Before dropping off food at your local food pantry or your next food drive:

- Check expiration dates.
- Consider single-serve or easy-open packaging.
- Consider various dietary needs.
- Check with the pantry before donating perishable items.

Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)

Amount per serving

Calories **230**

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 8g **10%**

Saturated Fat 1g **5%**

Trans Fat 0g

Cholesterol 0mg **0%**

Sodium 160mg **7%**

Total Carbohydrate 37g **13%**

Dietary Fiber 4g **14%**

Total Sugars 12g

Includes 10g Added Sugars **20%**

Protein 3g

Vitamin D 2mcg 10%

Calcium 260mg 20%

Iron 8mg 45%

Potassium 235mg 6%

* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.



Tips for Reading a Nutrition Label

Serving Size

Explains the size of a single serving and outlines how many servings are in the package.

Total Calories

Multiply the calories by the number of servings to get the total calories per container.

Limit Certain Nutrients

Compare food labels and choose options with lower amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar.

Beneficial Nutrients

Choose foods that contain beneficial nutrients such as calcium, fiber, iron, vitamin D, and potassium

% Daily Value

Larger numbers mean that the food contains more of that nutrient. Smaller numbers mean that the food contains less of that nutrient. Look for foods with higher % Daily values of fiber or iron, and look for foods with a lower % Daily Value of sodium, saturated fats, or added sugars.

Fruits & Vegetables

Examples of Donation Items:

- Canned fruit in 100% juice or water
- Low-sodium canned vegetables
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice
- Plain dried fruit
- Apple sauce (no sugar added)



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
≤2 g	≤230 mg	0 g	all 100% juice and plain dried fruit			≥2.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
			≥2.5 g	231-479 mg	1-11 g			

Grains

Examples of Donation Items:

- Whole grain bread
- Brown rice
- Whole grain pasta
- Whole grain oats



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet the following thresholds:			≥2.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥2.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g
≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g						

Protein

Examples of Donation Items:

- Canned tuna in water
- Low-sodium canned chicken
- Nuts & seeds
- Canned or dried beans
- Peanut butter (no sugar added)



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	2.5-4.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g

Dairy

Ask your local pantry before donating perishable foods.

Examples of Donation Items:

- Milk
- Cheese
- Yogurt (no sugar added)



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
≤3 g	≤230 mg	≤0 g	3.5-6 g	231-479 mg	1-11 g	≥6.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g

Non-Dairy Alternatives

Ask your local pantry before donating perishable foods.

Examples of Donation Items:

- Self-stable plant-based milk
- Plant-based yogurt
- Plant-based cheese



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
≤2 g	≤230 mg	≤6 g	≥2.5 g	231-479 mg	7-11 g	≥2.5 g	≥480 mg	≥12 g

Beverages

Examples of Donation Items:

- Bottled water
- Coffee beans
- Tea bags
- Electrolyte drinks (no sugar added)



Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
0 g	0 mg	0 g	0 g	1-140 mg	1-11 g	≥1 g	≥141 mg	≥12 g

Mixed Dishes

Ask your local pantry before donating perishable foods.



Examples of Donation Items:

- Low sodium soups & stews
- Bagged rice and bean mixes
- Boxed mac and cheese
- Low sodium frozen meals

Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
≤3 g	≤480 mg	≤6 g	3.5-6 g	481-599 mg	7-11 g	≥1 g	≥600 mg	≥12 g

Packaged & Processed Snacks



Examples of Donation Items:

- Baked chips or pretzels
- Popcorn
- Whole grain granola bars
- Whole grain crackers

Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
None			If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5 g	≥141 mg	≥7 g
			0-2 g	0-140mg	0-6 g			

Desserts

Ask your local pantry before donating perishable foods.



Examples of Donation Items:

- Frozen Yogurt
- Snack cakes
- Boxed cake/muffin mix
- Jello cups

Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugar **
None			None			All Desserts		

Condiments & Cooking Staples

Examples of Donation Items:

- Spices
- Olive oil or Avocado oil
- Flour
- Low-sodium salad dressing
- Sugar



HER Guidelines do not rank condiments or cooking staples because they encourage people cook more meals at home.

Miscellaneous Products

Examples of Donation Items:

- Vitamins
- Dietary Supplements
- Jarred baby food
- Formula milk



HER guidelines do not rank miscellaneous products because they are only considered necessary for specific populations or for treating specific conditions.

Disclaimers

* Definitions of food product categories are included in the text of the Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System full report. If you have questions on the process of how foods are categorized and ranked, view the report here: uconnruddcenter.org/her-guidelines

These recommendations are for educational purposes and are not a substitute for medical or dietary advice. Recommendations are based on a 2,000-calorie diet, which is a general guideline and may not be appropriate for all individuals. Consult with a qualified healthcare professional or registered dietitian for personalized dietary recommendations.

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