



Tips for Creating a Healthy Food Shelf & Inventory

The process of creating a healthier food shelf and inventory can seem overwhelming. This guide breaks down this process into practical ways to implement smart purchasing techniques, build strategic partnerships, encourage healthy donations, and improve your merchandising and shopping list. You can start by focusing on the strategies that will make the biggest impact in your food shelf and build on from there as resources allow.

Establish Smart Purchasing Habits

- ❑ **Shop smarter by partnering with multiple vendors.** Partner with food banks, wholesalers, and farmers to get the best deals and variety of quality, nutritious foods. If you want to increase fresh produce and have a small budget, connect with a local farmer who might be willing to give you a deal.
- ❑ **Reprioritize your dollars to be spent on healthier foods.** Minimize the amount of purchases made on highly processed foods and start adding and increasing the amount of less processed foods. Start with one or two things and build on as you are able. For example, you can start by buying less pancake mix or syrup and buying more whole grain oatmeal or couscous with the dollars saved.
- ❑ **Increase your food storage capacity.** This may include adding a warehouse or revising your food shelf layout to create more usable space. With more space, you can take advantage of opportunity buys or donations offered by your vendors or donors. Even if you do not add refrigerator or freezer storage, you might be able to buy healthier, non-perishable foods when the prices are more affordable.

LESS EXPENSIVE & HEALTHY FOODS		
<u>FRUITS & VEGETABLES</u>	<u>DELI & DAIRY</u>	<u>GRAINS</u>
Fresh	Margarine	Bean thread
Apples		Brown rice
Carrots	<u>PROTEIN</u>	Jasmine rice
Celery	Fresh	Medium/Long grain rice
Potatoes	Eggs	Oatmeal
Oranges	Canned	Whole wheat couscous
Pears	Black beans	Whole wheat spaghetti
Canned/Dried	Pinto beans	White spaghetti
Applesauce, unsweetened	Salmon	Vermicelli rice noodles
Green beans, no added salt	Sardines	
Mandarin oranges	Tuna	<u>COMBO/SNACKS</u>
Pasta/Tomato sauce	Turkey breast	Chicken Noodle Soup
Pineapple in juice	Vegetarian baked beans	Chili with Beans
Raisins	White chicken	Rice Flour
Frozen	Dried	Trail Mix Bars
Green beans	Black beans	
Mixed vegetables	Pinto beans	
*Based on The Food Group ordering list, these foods are less than \$1 per item whether packaged in a box, bottle, or can.		

Build Strategic Partnerships

- ❑ **Seek and maximize food rescue partnerships.** It is inevitable that you will receive some unhealthy foods with food rescue. When you receive a food rescue load, you can promote the healthy foods received by placing them first (and more of them) in your food shelf. When an item is abundant, people tend to take more. On the other hand, you can place unhealthy foods last (with less rows of them) in your food shelf.
- ❑ **Grow your own fruit, vegetable, or herb garden.** You can grow your own or partner with community growing gardens to build your inventory of fresh produce. If you want to grow your own or connect with home gardeners, the Gardening Matters and The Minnesota Project websites have great resources that give insight into the process, time, labor, and costs involved. Another way to get connected to local gardeners in your area is to use the “Plant an Extra Row” resource from the Minneapolis Healthy Food Shelf Network.

Encourage Healthy Donations

- ❑ **Create a “wish list” to give to donors.** People donate because they want to help, but often, they do not know how to make the most impact with their donation. By creating a wish list, you are simply informing your donors about which items are the most desired by the individuals you serve.
- ❑ **Host healthy food drives.** Target more expensive, yet healthy and non-perishable food items such as peanut butter, spices/herbs, whole grains, olive oil, and culturally specific foods. To do this, use your wish list or host food drives requesting one specific food type (i.e. whole grains). Also, try hosting a food drive outside of grocery store (with permission) and hand shoppers your “wish list”.
- ❑ **Use positive language to support healthy donations.** You can request the foods that you need without being demanding or unappreciative of the donations you receive. Try using the following statements:

“With your extra financial donation, we would buy more healthy foods including _____”,
“We are running low on these foods _____. Please donate these items if you can”, or
“Our clients request and appreciate donations of ___ (i.e. fresh fruits and veggies)”



Merchandise Healthy Foods like a Grocery Store

- ❑ **Create a healthy first impression.** Take a critical look at what first impression clients may form when they walk in your door. Minimize the industrial feel of your space by painting the walls a fresh color, brighten up the room with good lighting, add a floor mat at your entrance, or hang colorful posters. Provide a bulletin board to highlight your volunteers and staff or hang a chalk board at the entrance to highlight new healthy items you have in stock. Keep your food shelf clean and organized as much as possible.

- ❑ **Make healthy foods more visible, available, and appealing.** Place healthy categories of foods in prominent locations within your food shelf, such as fresh produce, whole grains, and healthy snacking items. Hang signage with simple healthy eating messages or use shelf tags to draw attention to specific items. Display items so that the front of the package is facing clients and pull items forward to the edge of the shelf. Think about how your clients fill their baskets. If a client only has a certain amount they can take home and they have to carry it, they may be more likely to take large, heavy, and healthy items if you place these first in your food shelf.
- ❑ **Make the healthy choice the easy choice.** Increase the amount of shelf space devoted to healthy food options and utilize the “sweet spot” for displaying them. This means placing healthy items at eye- or hip-level where they’re most likely to be noticed. Don’t forget children! Place healthy, kid-friendly items at their eye level since they often accompany parents and caregivers and can influence food selections. Lastly, make the healthy choice the default. For example, if you have a pre-packaged “meal in a bag”, include healthy options as the key ingredients.
- ❑ **Consider traffic flow through your space.** Many retail stores start their traffic pattern to the right of the entrance. In your food shelf layout, direct people to the right which will feel familiar to them. Avoid tight corners or narrow aisles to free up the lines and increase the amount of people you can serve easily. Also, consider how your volunteers and staff have to stock the shelves on delivery day and give them adequate space for carts, dollies or pallets.

Make a Healthier Shopping List

- ❑ **Reorganize your shopping list by MyPlate food groups.** Make it easy for clients to select a balanced variety of foods by organizing their choices into categories that match the basic food groups (fruits, veggies, grains, proteins, and dairy), or similar categories that match the cultural dietary preferences of your clients.
- ❑ **Encourage healthy selections without decreasing choice.** Strategically combine food categories to promote healthy options while maintaining client choice. Are bags of pasta and boxes of prepared “helper” meals currently their own separate categories that clients choose from at each visit? Try maintaining the same options, but combine them into a single “pasta” category with fewer selections allowed. With this combination, less healthy foods will compete with healthier foods and clients will likely choose the highly desirable healthy, staple food items. Valley Outreach food shelf’s shopping list is a great example of this concept.

Valley Outreach		Family of 3 - 4	
No Substitutions (unless approved by staff)			
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES		OTHER "COMBINATION" FOODS	
2	Frozen Fruit -OR- Vegetables	6	Condiments / Flavoring
All You Can Use	Fresh Produce (Refr and Cooler)	2	Baking Supplies
5	Canned Vegetables	5	Sides (Mac & Cheese) / Stuffing / Helpers
7	Canned Corn -OR- Potatoes	8	Soups / Canned Meals
3	Canned Pumpkin / Sweet Potatoes		HOUSEHOLD SPECIFIC ITEMS
4	Canned Fruit	8	Large Family Items
1	Dried Fruit	See Client Form	Special Diet Items
2	Spaghetti Sauce		Pet Food
4	Canned Tomatoes	See Client Form	Baby Food / Formula / Diapers
1	POWER Feature Produce	See Client Form	
DELI AND DAIRY		SNACKS	
See Sign	Deli Items	5	Large Snack Items (Popcorn / Cookies / Granola Bars)
See Sign	Yogurt	3 per person	Single Serve Snacks
See Sign	Cheese		
1	Margarine / Butter	BEVERAGES	
2	Milk	2	Large Beverages
PROTEIN FOODS		7 per person	Single Serve Beverages
1	Dozen Eggs -OR- Egg Substitute	See Sign	Complimentary Items
1	Large Meat	See Sign	Bread and Bakery Items
3	Small Meat		
See Sign	Frozen Bowls	PAPER AND HYGIENE	
1	POWER Feature Meal	1	Laundry Soap or Dish Soap
5	Canned Meat/Fish	3	Personal Hygiene
1	Peanut Butter / Nut Butter	1	Toilet Paper
3	Canned Beans	1	Other Paper Products
1	Dry Beans -OR- Bean Soup Mix	1	Female Hygiene
GRAINS			
4	Pasta		
3	Rice or Other Grain		
4	Cereal or Oatmeal		

*See backside for Category Definitions and FAQ.

- ❑ **Promote all types of fruits and vegetables.** Even though some fruits and vegetables are healthier than others (e.g. low sodium vegetables are better than regular sodium and fruit in its own juice is better than fruit in heavy syrup), encourage clients to eat more fruits and veggies in general, regardless of the type. Only 50% of all Americans meet the recommended servings of fruits and veggies per day, so every extra serving helps, even if it’s not the ideal option.

Questions?

For further assistance or questions on how to build a healthier inventory and food shelf, contact us at:

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