

Community Health Commitment

Nutrition guidelines for the receipt and distribution of food

Statement of Purpose

Foodlink is a public health organization focused on leveraging the power of food to alleviate hunger, end food insecurity, and build healthier communities. Our daily work reflects our efforts to stem diet-related disease and its effects in our community.

To that end, Foodlink is committed to increasing our distribution of fresh, nutritious food and decreasing our distribution of non-nutritious foods and beverages.

Our Community Health Commitment (CHC) informs Foodlink staff, member agencies and their clients, donors, government programs, and the community at-large of this pledge and how we intend to carry it out.

Policy Rationale and Benefits

Since 1978, Foodlink has supplied food to help families in hard times. In recent years, Foodlink has adjusted its mission, vision, and programming to reflect the changing nature of food insecurityⁱ and the increasing rates of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and other serious diet-related diseases and conditions in our community and around the country.ⁱⁱ As Feeding Americaⁱⁱⁱ and food banks around the country have recognized, food banks play a pivotal public health role in providing healthful foods to community members in need.^{iv}

Foodlink is dedicated to promoting healthy dietary patterns and providing nutrient-dense, healthful foods that have not been shown to contribute to obesity and chronic disease, while addressing the hunger needs of the population being served.^{iv} Certain foods and beverages, such as sugar-sweetened beverages and chips, are economical and easily available. They are also predominantly non-nutritious and typically high in added sugars, saturated fat, *trans* fat, and sodium, all of which are known to contribute to obesity and other diet-related diseases.^v Clients report that they have easy access to these foods, but not necessarily to healthy choices.^{i, vi, vii} To counteract the effects of the prevalence of non-nutritious food in our environment,

Foodlink works both to increase access to health-promoting foods like fruits and vegetables and to decrease the amount of non-nutritious food in the food system. Foodlink understands that nutrition-focused food banking is client-focused food banking, and we want our clients to know that their health and preferences for more healthful foods^{i, vi} are among our highest considerations in acquiring food.

Foodlink ranks the relative nutritional quality of the foods in our inventory to assist our community partners in choosing items that best meet the needs of their clients. The system, called The Healthy Choice, incorporates evidence-based research about which foods are the most and least supportive and impactful to long-term individual health. When The Healthy Choice was conceived, all other existing nutrition rankings relevant to Foodlink's work² were utilized as reference.



The color-coded ranking — green: choose often, yellow: choose sometimes, and red: choose rarely — is viewed via our members' online ordering system. (See page 3 for complete ranking.)

The Healthy Choice is not a fixed and definitive ruling on all items in every circumstance, as there may be unique situations or products that require a decision from Foodlink's Nutrition Resource Manager that fall outside the bounds of the ranking. Such decisions would be based on the Nutrition Resource Manager's knowledge and discretion to make appropriate decisions for Foodlink and its member agencies.

This document provides staff, vendors, donors, fiduciaries, and community members with information about the types of food that Foodlink will procure, encourage, and prioritize. It demonstrates good corporate citizenship, models responsible

behavior, and will be used for communication with donors and other suppliers. Foodlink senior leadership is committed to reducing the distribution of items ranked red and increasing distribution of those ranked green.

Food and Beverage Inventory

a) Types Included:

- Donated from retailers and manufacturers
- Purchased by Foodlink
- Supplied by government sources (i.e. USDA TEFAP)

b) Types Excluded:

- Heterogeneous donations

Note: Foodlink continuously works to improve internal systems to enable further sorting and ranking of heterogeneous donated product.

Reducing Distribution of Red-ranked Items

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015–2020^v recommend limiting consumption of saturated fats and *trans* fats, added sugars, and sodium. Foods and beverages with high quantities of these are ranked by Foodlink in the red category.

Foodlink commits to:

- Decline full pallets of sugar-sweetened beverages and candy
- Ensure meals prepared by Foodlink’s Community Kitchen contain no artificial sweeteners, flavors, colors, or high-fructose corn syrup
- Limit the total pounds of red-ranked items in inventory to no more than 5% of the total ranked inventory

Increasing Distribution of Green-ranked Items

Foodlink’s CHC and nutrition ranking are based upon evidence-based research,^{i,vi,vii} which emphasize the importance of making the most healthful options available to consumers as often as possible.

Foodlink commits to:

- Provide only fresh or frozen fruit and vegetable servings from the Foodlink Community Kitchen
- Guarantee adequate water is available for partners to choose for their clients as a healthy beverage option, and in case of emergency
- Ensure that a minimum of 95% of all food and beverage distributed by Foodlink meets the criteria of the green and yellow categories

Mission. To leverage the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities.

Vision. We believe that the fight against hunger and the fight against poverty are one and the same. We envision a future in which food is recognized as a human right and every person is able to feed themselves and their families in dignity. Together, we work to create a more nourished, prosperous region.

Julia Tedesco, MPA, President & CEO | Terra Keller, MBA, Chief Operating & Financial Officer | Mitch Gruber, PhD, Chief Strategy & Partnerships Officer | Laura Held, MS, Sr. Manager of Nutrition & Food Safety

Endnotes

1. Feeding America’s Hunger in America 2014 study reports that the Feeding America network provides assistance to 389 million duplicated clients each year and that 54% of client households report that at least one household member was employed in the prior year.
2. Nutrition rankings used to create The Healthy Choice:
 - Original Foodlink nutrition ranking, Laura Sugarwala, 2012.
 - New York State Department of Health, Division of Nutrition, Bureau of Nutrition Risk Reduction, Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), Policy and Procedure Manual, 2016: “HPNAP Guide for Making Healthy Food Selections,” “Nutrition Policies,” and “Minimum Food Guide for a 3-Day Pantry Package,” revised 2018.
 - New York State Department of Health, Just Say Yes to Fruits & Vegetables (JSY) Healthy Pantry Initiative (2017–2018): “HPI: Choosing Foods to Nudge”
 - Feeding America, Foods to Encourage (F2E): “Broad F2E” and “Detailed F2E,” July 2015, <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/resource/foods-to-encourage-background/>

References

- i Weinfield NS, Mills G, Borger C, Gearing M, Macaluso T, Montaquila J, Zedlewski S. Hunger in America 2014, National Report Prepared for Feeding America. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/hunger-in-america>. Accessed September 5, 2017.
- ii Seligman, HK, Laraia, BA, Kushel MB. Food insecurity is associated with chronic disease among low-income NHANES participants. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 2010; 140.2: 304–310.
- iii Feeding America’s *Foods to Encourage* Background. July 2015. <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/resource/foods-to-encourage-background/>. Accessed September 6, 2017.
- iv Campbell E, Webb K, Ross M, Crawford P, Hudson H, Hecht K. Nutrition-Focused Food Banking. Discussion Paper, Institute of Medicine, Washington DC. <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/resource/nutrition-focused-food-banking/>.
- v U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.
- vi Campbell E, Hudson H, Webb K, Crawford PB. Food preferences of users of the emergency food system. *J Hunger Environ Nutr*. 2011;6(2):179–187.
- vii Webb K, Campbell E, Ross M, Crawford P. *Improving the Nutritional Quality of Foods Distributed to Lower-Income Families Through Emergency Food Services: A Study of Nutrition-Related Policies and Practices of Food Banks and Food Pantries*. Available at: http://cwh.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/primary_pdfs/Improving_the_Nutritional_Quality_of_Foods_Distributed_to_Lower-Income_Families_through_Emergency_Food_Services_6.12_0.pdf. Accessed January 26, 2015.

Foodlink is committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by increasing distribution of fresh, nutritious foods and decreasing distribution of unhealthy foods and beverages.

This nutrition ranking serves as a guide

For ranking Foodlink product inventory and steering procurement decisions

To help our member agencies and partners choose healthy options for their clients and solicit nutritious donations from the community

To help community members make healthy choices for their families

This is a MyPlate-focused guide that ranks common foods within the five MyPlate categories: Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein, and Dairy. This ranking also tackles nutrition content for other products that do not fit within the MyPlate confines.



Particular attention is paid to sugar, sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat content, which, when consumed in excess, can contribute to diet-related diseases, such as obesity, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

CHOOSE OFTEN

Most nutritious, such as:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Canned beans and vegetables with no salt added
- Whole grains
- Lean meats
- Milk, low-fat or non-fat, unflavored

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

Moderately nutritious, such as:

- Canned beans and vegetables with ≤140mg sodium/serving
- Refined grains
- Whole or ground meats <90% lean
- Flavored milk, low-fat or non-fat

CHOOSE RARELY

Least nutritious, such as:

- Canned beans and vegetables with >140mg sodium/serving
- Canned fruit in syrup
- High-sodium processed meats, such as ham, bacon, sausage
- Flavored milk, 2% or higher
- Mixed meals, such as macaroni and cheese
- Candy



VEGETABLES

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Fresh**, including value-added processed
- **Frozen with no added sugar or sauce**
- **Canned or jarred with no salt added**

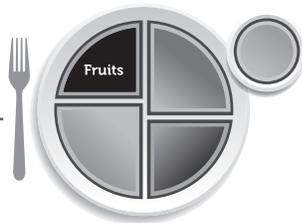
CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **100% juice**
- **Canned or jarred with ≤ 140 mg sodium/serving**
- **Frozen with added salt or sauce and ≤ 140 mg sodium/serving**
- **Dried/dehydrated with no salt added, including mashed potato flakes**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Canned or frozen with added salt or sauce and >140 mg sodium/serving**
- **Canned or jarred in heavy syrup or light syrup, e.g. yams**
- **Dried/dehydrated with salt added, including flavored mashed potato flakes and au gratin potatoes**
- **Breaded or fried**

TIP: Canned vegetables with added salt (sodium) can be part of a healthy diet. When possible, choose No Salt Added. When not possible, rinse canned vegetables off thoroughly in a strainer/colander to greatly reduce sodium intake.



FRUITS

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Fresh**, including value-added processed
- **Frozen with no added sugar or sauce**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **100% juice**
- **Canned or jarred in water or 100% juice**
- **Unsweetened applesauce**
- **Dried/dehydrated**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Canned or jarred in heavy syrup or light syrup**
- **Sweetened applesauce**
- **Frozen with added sugar**

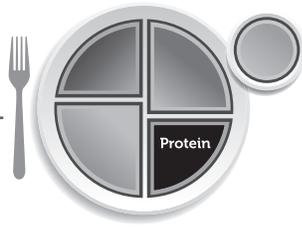
TIP: Due to overconsumption, especially by children, 100% juice, canned fruit in 100% juice, unsweetened applesauce, and dried fruit, which have a high concentration of natural sugar, are listed as Yellow instead of Green, despite being packed with important vitamins and minerals.

In 2019, Healthy Eating Research group released the following recommendation for children and juice:

- **Infants less than 12 months** old should not consume juice.
- **Children ages 1 – 3** should consume no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (4 ounces) of 100% juice per day.
- **Children ages 4 – 5** should consume no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (6 ounces) of 100% juice per day.

These amounts are upper limits, not minimum requirements.

For more information, see: HealthyDrinksHealthyKids.org



PROTEIN

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Dry beans and lentils**
- **Canned beans with no salt added**
- **Lean, high protein meats**
 - fresh or frozen
 - no breading or added seasoning containing salt or sodium
- Includes:
 - chicken (no packages with just wings)
 - turkey
 - beef (no oxtails or ribs)
 - venison
 - buffalo
 - pork (no ribs, ham hocks)
- **Ground beef and ground turkey ≥90% lean**
- **Fish and shellfish**
- **Canned tuna, chicken, salmon packed in water**
- **Eggs**
- **Tofu, tempeh**
- **Nuts and seeds with no salt or seasoning added**
- **Peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter, natural with no added salt, sugar, or oil**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Canned beans with ≤140mg sodium/serving**
- **Peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter with added salt, sugar or oil**
- **Canned tuna, chicken, salmon packed in oil**
- **Whole or ground meats <90% lean**
- **Breaded or seasoned meats with ≤140mg sodium/serving, e.g. nuggets, tenders**
- **Luncheon/deli meats with ≤140mg sodium/serving**
- **Canned pork or other meat with ≤140mg sodium/serving**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Canned beans with >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Ham**
- **Spam**
- **Bacon**
- **Sausage**
- **Hot dogs**
- **Pepperoni**
- **Luncheon/deli meats >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Breaded or seasoned meats with >140mg sodium/serving, e.g. nuggets, tenders**
- **Canned ham, hash**
- **Canned pork or other meat with >140mg sodium/serving**
- **Canned stew, chili, beef ravioli, etc.**
- **Nuts and seeds with salt or seasoning added**

TIPS: Canned beans with added salt (sodium) can be part of a healthy diet. When possible, choose No Salt Added. When not possible, rinse canned beans off thoroughly in a strainer/colander to greatly reduce sodium intake.

To be considered an adequate protein source, canned stew, chili, beef ravioli, etc. must contain ≥7g protein/serving.



GRAINS

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Whole grains**
 - brown rice
 - bulgur wheat
 - wild rice
 - quinoa
 - barley
 - whole wheat flour
 - oats/plain oatmeal
 - buckwheat
- **Whole wheat pasta**
- **Whole grain breads**
 - bread
 - bagels
 - rolls
 - pita
 - whole grain pancake mix
- **Whole grain cereal with ≤6g sugar/dry ounce**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Refined grain (not whole grain) products**
 - bread
 - white rice
 - pasta
 - egg noodles, etc.
- **Refined grain pancakes/waffles, mix and pre-made**
- **Refined grain cereal with ≤6g sugar/dry ounce**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Mixed grain meals, e.g. Mac 'n Cheese, Rice-A-Roni, Pasta Roni**
- **Biscuits, mix and pre-made**
- **Whole or refined grain cereal with >6g sugar/dry ounce**
- **Flavored oatmeal**
- **Grain-based desserts and snacks, e.g. cakes, cookies, muffins**
- **Stuffing mix**

TIPS: A whole grain product must have a whole grain (e.g. whole wheat flour, whole grain oats) as the first ingredient.

Although flavored oatmeal is a whole grain food, it contains a significant amount of added sugar (typically around 13g/serving). A healthier alternative is to use plain oats/oatmeal and add flavor with, for example: fresh fruit, cinnamon, peanut butter, or a small amount of jam or maple syrup.



DAIRY

CHOOSE OFTEN

- **Milk, low-fat (1%) or non-fat (skim), unflavored**
- **Yogurt, low-fat or non-fat**
- **Cheese and cottage cheese, low-fat or non-fat**
- **Fortified milk substitute, e.g. soy, almond: plain, regular, unsweetened, or unsweetened vanilla**

CHOOSE SOMETIMES

- **Milk, 2% or higher, unflavored**
- **Flavored milk, low-fat or non-fat**
- **Yogurt, NOT low-fat or non-fat, including granola mix-ins**
- **Cheese and cottage cheese, NOT low-fat or non-fat**
- **Cream cheese and sour cream, low-fat or non-fat**
- **Fortified milk substitute, flavored or sweetened**

CHOOSE RARELY

- **Flavored milk, 2% or higher**
- **Half & Half and cream**
- **Yogurt with cookie or candy mix-ins**
- **2% or higher sour cream and cream cheese**
- **Butter**
- **Cheese product, e.g. spray cheese, Cheez Whiz**
- **Whipped cream/topping**
- **Ice cream/frozen dessert**

TIPS: Milk can be fresh or shelf-stable.

Plant-based milk/beverage, such as soy milk, should contain at least 8g of protein per 8 oz. serving in order to adequately substitute for dairy milk.

MIXED MEALS & SOUPS

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed meals and soups with ≤ 140mg sodium/serving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramen • Lunchables • Au gratin potatoes • Mixed meals and soups with > 140mg sodium/serving

TIP: Mixed meals and soups are high in sodium/salt. Due to their convenience, they can be consumed more often than is healthful.

Whenever possible, choose whole foods to create a meal from scratch.

CONDIMENTS, SAUCES, DRESSINGS, FOOD PREP INGREDIENTS, SPICES

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hummus • Vinegars • Mustard, yellow or brown • Herbs and spices, including mixtures with no sodium (e.g. Italian seasoning) • Whole grain flour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil • Honey mustard • Vinegar-based salad dressing, not creamy • Low-fat or fat-free salad dressing, can be creamy • Tomato sauce, paste or salsa • Low-sodium soy sauce • Refined grain flour, e.g. white all-purpose flour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salt • Sugar • Gravy • Ketchup • Hot sauce • Soy sauce • Mayonnaise • Pickles, olives • Butter, margarine • Cheese sauce, including alfredo • Jelly • Other sauces • Pancake syrup • Dessert topping, sauce, syrup, frosting • Creamy salad dressing, not low-fat or fat-free • Herb and spice mixtures with sodium, e.g. taco or Cajun seasoning

TIPS: Many condiments and sauces are high in fat, sodium, and/or sugar. When using those items, such as BBQ sauce or mayonnaise, try dipping food into it, rather than pouring or spreading it on.

Some food preparation ingredients (e.g. baking powder, baking soda, corn starch) are not listed, as they are used in such small quantities and thus offer negligible nutritional content.

PROCESSED SNACKS & DESSERTS

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain crackers • Plain popcorn • Unsalted whole grain pretzels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chips • Salted Pretzels • Sweets • Candy • Pudding • Crackers, not whole grain • Baked goods, mix and pre-made, e.g. cookies, cake, brownies, pies, pie crust • Jell-o • Salted/buttered popcorn

TIP: The healthiest snacks and desserts are fruits and vegetables, such as fruit salad or veggies with hummus.

BEVERAGES

CHOOSE OFTEN	CHOOSE SOMETIMES	CHOOSE RARELY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, plain or carbonated (seltzer, mineral water) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee • Unsweetened Tea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soda/Pop • Punch • Hot chocolate • Energy drinks • Sports drinks • Lemonade • Juice drinks, non-100% juice • Powdered drink mixes • Sweetened Tea

TIPS: Nutrition supplement drinks (e.g. Boost, Ensure) are not listed, as they are not encouraged for individuals who do not require them nor discouraged for those who do.

See "Dairy" category for milk and plant-based milk/beverage.

See "Fruit" and "Vegetables" for 100% juice.