BLESSINGS IN A BACKPACK

APPROVED FOOD ITEMS

Blessings in a Backpack includes a minimum of the following items per child each weekend:

TWO PROTEIN ITEMS | TWO BREAKFAST ITEMS | TWO HEALTHY SNACKS

A Registered Dietitian committed to providing healthy options evaluates the menu items to ensure they are low in sodium and sugar, made with whole grains, and a good protein source. We also consider the ingredients, as we prefer to avoid foods with artificial colors and flavors, high fructose corn syrup, and MSG when available by manufacturers.

All items are shelf stable, ready-to-eat, and provide appropriate nutrition for school-aged children. When purchasing the food, please check that canned items have a pop-top and that snacks, like popcorn, are already popped. We cannot guarantee the children have access to basic kitchen appliances like a can opener, microwave, or stove.

Please choose from the approved items below when hosting a food drive for a Blessings in a Backpack program.

PROTEIN ITEMS

- Individual meat sticks, like Jack Link's or Slim Jim
- Ready-to-eat pasta bowls, like Chef Boyardee ravioli or mac & cheese (pop-top lids required)
- Ready-to-eat soup (pop-top lids required)

BREAKFAST ITEMS

- Individual cereal bowls or boxes
- Cereal and granola bars
- Shelf-stable yogurt or milk packages

HEALTHY SNACK ITEMS

- Fruit cups or applesauce pouches
- Sunflower seeds
- Individual packaged crackers, like Cheez-It, Goldfish, or animal crackers
- Snack-size pretzels or popcorn
- Raisins or craisin packets

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FOOD ITEMS NOT APPROVED

- **Perishable items**. We assume that our children do not have access to refrigeration, so **we avoid any item that requires refrigeration or a freezer.**

- **Fresh produce items that bruise easily** like bananas, berries, or peaches. *You can include* an apple, orange, or clementine/nectarine, as these fruits are less likely to become damaged.

- **Items that contain peanuts**. Due to the potential severity of peanut allergies, we **avoid all food items that contain peanuts.**

- **Bulk items that require further packaging** like bulk cereal or rice packaged into individual bags. Further packaging could cause potential food safety concerns. **All items must be provided in a sealed package** from the manufacturer that **includes the production date and nutrition and allergen information.**

- **Food items that need to be prepared** like boxed macaroni and cheese, condensed soup, or Ramen noodles. We cannot assume the children have access to kitchen equipment such as a stove or microwave, or kitchen supervision. We ensure that our items are ready to eat. *Raman noodles are very high in sodium and contain minimal nutritional value.*

- **Food items that require a can opener or have sharp edges**. We cannot assume the children have access to basic kitchen appliances like a can opener.