

Nutritional Food Aid

A network of community food banks provides a vital service for residents who are experiencing food injustice. In 2023 for example, Lewisham Trussell Trust Food Banks provided help to 2000 people monthly on average. Lewisham's Food Justice Action Plan highlighted the physical, social, and mental impacts of food injustice. One of the main aims from the plan was for all Lewisham residents to be able to enjoy reliable and fair access to food, which is sufficiently nutritious, sustainable, culturally appropriate, and affordable. This nutritional food aid briefing aims to support food banks in providing food parcels which are nutritious, culturally appropriate, considerate of practicalities and signpost to initiatives available to Lewisham residents targeting food injustice.



Dignity and choice

From an Appreciative Inquiry into what food support at its best looks like, we know that people value choice and accessing good quality food to be able to make healthy choices. Further information on this is found here: [Appreciative Inquiry - What food support at its best looks like in Lewisham - Lewisham Local](#).

Cultural preferences

The inability to access food according to cultural preferences contributes to food injustice. Cultural preferences must be considered for individuals accessing food aid. It is also important to consider religious requirements when arranging food parcels, for example Halal meals. Examples of which can be found here: [Nutritional Guidelines | IFAN \(foodaidnetwork.org.uk\)](#).

Eatwell Guide

The eatwell guide demonstrates how much we should eat from different food groups to maintain a healthy balanced diet.

Fruit and vegetables

This should make up over one third of our daily diets. This includes a mixture of fresh fruit and vegetables, tinned, frozen. It can include fruit juices and smoothies, but this should only be a maximum of 150ml/day.

Carbohydrate and starch rich foods

Carbohydrates and starchy foods should make up over one third of daily diets. Preference should be for wholewheat options over white processed options. These include wholewheat bread, pasta, couscous, potatoes, cereals.

Dairy or dairy alternatives

Dairy products are an important source of calcium which is important for bone health. Sources of dairy include milk, cheese, dried milk powder. Dairy alternatives include soya products, almond milk, rice milk.

Protein rich foods

Protein rich foods include meats, fish, beans, lentils, nuts and tofu. Options can include fresh and tinned. We should aim for 2 portions of fish a week and try to have white meat such as chicken over processed red meat.

Unsaturated oils and spreads

Oils and spreads are high in energy so should only be used in small amounts. Unsaturated fats are the healthier option and include vegetable, rapeseed, olive and sunflower oils.

Example 3-day food parcel

Where possible food parcels should meet the cultural and nutritional requirements as per the eat well guide. Within Lewisham, Black African and Caribbean families are more likely to suffer food injustice. An example 3-day crisis food parcel for a Caribbean family of 4 can be found below, according to the eat well guide.

Fruit and vegetables

- 4 tins of fruit in water or juice
- 3 tins of vegetables
- 1 jar of vegetables such as okra
- 2 tins of tomatoes
- Tomato puree
- 1 carton of long-life fruit juice

Carbohydrate and starch rich foods

- 1 large pack of porridge oats/ cereal
- 2 packs of pasta
- 2 packs of rice or couscous
- 1 tin of chickpeas
- 1 large yam

Protein rich foods

- 4 tins of beans
- 1 pack of lentils
- 3 chicken breasts
- 4 tins of meat/ fish

Dairy or dairy alternatives

- 2 cartons of milk (dairy or alternative)
- 2 tins of dairy based or soya desserts
- Block of cheese

Unsaturated oils and spreads

- 500ml bottle of sunflower oil
- Or small block of butter

Example recipes for Black African and Caribbean families can be found here: [Recipe book co-created with Lewisham families](#). Further culturally adapted eat well guides for West African, East African, Caribbean, Bengali and Polish can be found here: [Culturally Adapted Eatwell Guides | Enfield Council](#).

Dietary requirements

Food parcels should be arranged with dietary requirements considered including both health related and preferences. For example, recipients with diabetes should receive food parcels containing food with a low glycaemic index such as wholegrains, lentils, and beans. The parcels should limit food with high glycaemic index such as white bread, juice, and jam.

Further health conditions which should be considered when providing food parcels include people with coeliac disease should have a diet without gluten, products included may include potatoes, gluten free bread, rice. Another consideration is for people who are lactose intolerance and avoid dairy as a result. Here lactose free milks and plant based alternative products should be used in replacement.

Dietary requirements which are not due to an underlying medical condition should also be catered for. For example, vegan diets to ensure no animal products are included and vegetarian ensuring no meat products are included.

Further guidance and example recipes for different dietary requirements can be found here: [Nutritional Guidelines | IFAN \(foodaidnetwork.org.uk\)](#).

Breastfeeding / Infant feeding support

Breastfeeding is recommended for the first year of life as it provides multiple health benefits to infant and Mother. If an infant is breastfed, they can exclusively breastfeed up to 6 months, from 6 months they should be introduced to solids. If infants are being formula fed and parents/carers attend with no access to formula, please refer to health visitors as per the emergency infant formula milk pathway. Further support both breastfeeding and formula feeding can be found here:

[Breastfeeding - Lewisham and Greenwich NHS \(lgt.nhs.uk\)](https://www.lgt.nhs.uk).

Healthy Start

The healthy start scheme is for pregnant women and children under 4 years old on a low-income. The individual receives a card which is topped up with money every 4 weeks. The card allows purchase of the following items:

- Plain liquid cow's milk
- Infant cow's milk formula
- Fresh, frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables
- Fresh, tinned and dried pulses

All pregnant people and young children under 4 are entitled to the Lewisham free vitamin D scheme.

Find out more here: [Get help to buy food and milk \(Healthy Start\)](#).

Access to cooking facilities

When producing food parcels, it is vital to consider the cooking facilities available to an individual. Consider asking if the individual has access to the following:

- An oven?
- A hob?
- A kettle?
- A can opener?
- A microwave?

Ensure food parcels are suitable for the equipment individuals have in place. Some example meals for individuals without access to a hob include 'no-fry noodles', 'no pan pasta', 'overnight oats', which can be found under the oven free recipes: [Nutritional Guidelines | IFAN \(foodaidnetwork.org.uk\)](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk).

Access to storage facilities

Consider the storage facilities individuals have available including fridge and freezer. Adapt food parcels accordingly for example if recipients don't have access to a refrigerator ensure products are provided which don't require refrigeration such as tinned fish over fresh fish.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for bone and teeth growth and to keep muscles healthy. A lack of vitamin D can cause bone pain, muscle weakness, soft bones, lack of tooth growth.

Small amounts of vitamin D can be found certain foods including:

- Oily fish such as sardines and mackerel
- Red meat
- Egg yolks

Vitamin D deficiency is common in certain groups of the population including children under four, pregnant women and women who have had a baby in the last year. That is why free vitamin D supplements are offered for these groups in Lewisham. These are available through pharmacies and some children centres and family hubs.

To find out more and which pharmacies offer free vitamin D supplements please follow the link:

[Lewisham Council - Get free vitamin D](#).

Further information and support

- Please refer to the Food Standard Agency for guidelines for community cooking and foodbanks: [Food safety for community cooking and food banks | Food Standards Agency](#)
- If your food project would like additional support and advice, please get in contact with goodfood@lewishamlocal.com or join Lewisham's Food Justice Alliance email FoodJusticeActionPlan@lewisham.gov.uk.
- For further information, please visit: [Good Food Lewisham | Greater London](#)