Helping Hands is a guidebook for volunteers who provide meals to soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other such facilities. It offers a practical resource for volunteers who donate prepared foods to community feeding organizations so they can create healthy and safe meals. The guidebook was created with the budget-minded and busy cook in mind.

Several agencies expressed the need for a guide that would provide advice to donors of prepared foods. Helpings Hands is that resource. Two graduate students enrolled in independent studies, supervised by Kathryn Kolasa PhD, RD, LDN, conducted interviews of agency directors and volunteers and developed the content.

### Components of a Healthy Meal

A healthy meal provides important nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, good fats and protein sources, and fiber. The guidebook includes simple yet helpful ways to incorporate healthy foods into a menu while cutting out unnecessary fats and sugars. Furthermore, a healthy meal does not need to be expensive or complicated. We have included a variety of recipes that use affordable ingredients. Readers will also find helpful grocery lists and tips to help cooks keep a meal healthy.

### Protein
- Choose lean meats, fish, poultry, or nuts
- Remove the skin from chicken and other poultry

### Vegetables
- Use canned or frozen vegetables to save time in cooking
- Make a hearty salad using fresh vegetables and toppings such as fruits, nuts, or beans
- Use fresh, canned, frozen or dried fruit
- Offer a quick fruit salad made from canned fruit packed in water and chopped bananas

### Bread and Cereals
- Choose whole grain breads and pasta
- Use brown rice in casseroles and soups

### Desserts
- Use fruit as a healthy substitute for sweet desserts
- Replace regular sugar with sugar substitutes
- Offer sugar-free beverages instead of sweetened drinks
- Prepare iced tea using a sugar substitute instead of sugar

### Importance of Food Safety

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that each year roughly 48 million people in the United States get sick from a food-borne illness, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service recommends four simple steps for keeping food safe:

1. Clean
2. Separate
3. Cook
4. Chill

Bacteria grow and multiply when in the “danger” temperature zone between 41°F and 155°F. Use an instant-read thermometer to ensure that foods are cooked to a safe temperature.

### Recipes

The array of recipes presented here may complement our sample meals or other meal plans. Shopping lists are included for convenience.

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