

Food bank parcels high in sugar and low in vital nutrients

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Food bank parcels do not provide a balanced, healthy diet for those

requiring emergency food and would benefit from being supplemented with fresh produce, according to new research.

In a paper published in *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, standard three-day food parcels from 10 food banks from across Oxfordshire were assessed for their nutritional content based on dietary reference values. One of the food banks visited was in the Trussell Trust network and nine were independently run.

The team from the Hugh Sinclair Unit of Human Nutrition at the University of Reading found that the food parcels contained only a quarter of the recommended amount of Vitamin A and D and contained nearly 600% of the recommended levels of [sugar](#). The [sugar content](#) was particularly high as the parcels included a bag of sugar and a jar of jam that were unlikely to be used up entirely over three days. But even without the jam and sugar, the parcels still contained 277% of the recommended levels of dietary sugar.

Dr. Roz Fallaize, lead author of the paper from the University of Reading said:

"Although the contents of food bank parcels are well thought out, and get a lot of the [nutritional content](#) right, there are still concerns about them being able to provide a healthy, balanced diet, particularly if they are being used frequently; as reported by some of the independent distributors.

"In the parcels we tested we particularly noted a lack of Vitamins A and D. Missing out on those vitamins in the long term could leave people at risk of a weaker immune system.

"Vitamins A and D are often found in fresh produce such as leafy vegetables, eggs and cheese. This highlights the need for food bank

parcels to be supplemented with fresh foods, especially as they often aren't available from food bank charities who may not be able to store perishable items."

Professor Julie Lovegrove, Director of the Hugh Sinclair Unit of Human Nutrition at the University of Reading said:

"Availability of food parcels is very important for many groups of people and we were so impressed by the dedication of those working in the food banks often in a voluntary capacity. It also offers a great opportunity to give clear guidance on healthy eating.

"However, we were surprised by the large amount of sugary foods in the parcels that could lead to high sugar intakes linked with longer term health problems. Including more [fresh produce](#) rich in nutrients and reducing sugary foods would help to make the parcels more healthy."

Samantha Stapley, chief operating officer at the Trussell Trust, said:

"The Trussell Trust supports about two thirds of food banks in the UK, and in this sample of 10 food banks, there is just one food bank that is in the Trussell Trust network. The three-day emergency food parcels, provided to people in crisis by food banks in our network, are emergency provisions—on average people visit our food banks two or three times a year.

"We regularly consult with nutritionists about the [contents of our food bank parcels](#), which is why two years ago we removed bags of sugar from our packing lists. Fresh fruit and vegetables are provided by [food banks](#) who can store it safely and we're working with our network to help offer more of this, but it's not right that anyone should need to use a food bank in the first place. That's why we continually campaign to ensure a future where no one needs to use a food bank. No charity can

replace the dignity of having enough money to be able to buy your own [food](#)."

More information: R. Fallaize et al. Nutritional adequacy and content of food bank parcels in Oxfordshire, UK: a comparative analysis of independent and organisational provision, *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/jhn.12740](https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12740)

Provided by University of Reading

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