



Want to help the homeless in your area? You can create a care package, survival kit, or blessing bag. No doubt you've seen these posted online somewhere, but often those items are not as helpful as you might hope. I can tell you what to include to help the widest range of the homeless, and why.

Clothes

Gloves (ones you can layer are good, so if something gets wet you can switch, waterproof are good)

Socks (this is possibly the most important thing, thermal or wool)

NOT cheap socks. Socks are not available at the thrift store like most other clothes, but keeping your feet clean and healthy is important when they are your primary transportation. At one point I had regular socks, wool socks, plus a styrofoam cutout under the liner of my boots. If you know the wonder of wool socks you know that's what you should get.

Toiletries & Health

Band-aids (big ones to cover blisters are nice)

Deodorant (often already have or can get free)

EmergenC, Airborne, chewable **multivitamins** (if you aren't eating or sleeping right you are more likely to get sick, also food is very accessible in this country, but often it is not the most nutritious)

Lip balm/**chapstick**

Lotion

Sunscreen

Tissues

Toothbrush and toothpaste (often already have or can get free, toothbrushes with covers are nice)

Wet wipes

NOT soap, if you are in a place with a shower they will have soap, public restrooms have soap

NOT shampoo, soap cleans your hair too. Travel size conditioner is nice.

NOT hand sanitizer, mouthwash, or anything else with alcohol in it. Addicts are drinking this stuff to get a buzz

NOT large bottles of anything, big bottles won't fit in the backpack holding everything you own, include multiple small bottles they can trade or give away if you feel the small bottle isn't enough

NOT really smelly toiletries, even if you think it smells good or they must stink and want to mask their odor. Hello, insulting

Food

Beef jerky (even if your teeth are junk you can suck on this until it's mush and still get the protein)

Breakfast bars or cereal bars (they do crumble but you can still eat them)

Chocolate (sure it may melt, melted chocolate tastes good)

Mints (gum is hard for the dentally challenged)

Peanut butter crackers

Raisins/dried fruit

Snack cups/applesauce/pudding cups

Tuna/chicken salad **cracker kits**

Water (dehydration is one of the biggest challenges, especially if you can't get around easily)

*personal taste, dietary restrictions, and the status of your teeth limit how useful food will be

NOT granola bars/trail mix or other crunchy or sticky foods. If you want to include granola bars they will keep a long time, but they may have to be traded for something more appropriate. Many of our homeless are vets and do not have access to proper dental care. The way we treat our vets is a post for another day.

Money

Yes, money. You should make the best choice for you on whether you include money. Not a ton of money, but if you had none dollars you can make \$20 go really far.

***Money and safety:** There is always an issue of safety when dealing with people who might be addicts or mentally ill and possibly violent. If you are donating your packages to the shelter money can be included (you should ask the shelter). If you are handing these out personally you might want to leave the money out.

Things that can be bought with that shiny money/needs you can't predict

{you can feel free to buy these things and include in care packages}:

Coat	Infant formula
Scarf and hat	Medicine/pain killers
Sewing kit	Nail clippers
Shoes	Razor
Sleeping bag or mat	Pet food
Underwear	A day pass to a gym, campground, or truck stop for a shower
Adult diapers	A night in a hotel to sleep warmly and soundly, without worrying about someone stealing your stuff
Baby diapers	
Comb/brush	
Feminine products or menstrual cup	Can opener
First aid kit	Flashlight

Gas

PO box to receive mail

Hand warmers

Quarters for the **laundromat**

Pay-as-you-go **cell phone** and minutes

Stamps

Pillar **candles**, matches

Tarp 6x8 gives good cover without being bulky

NOT gift cards. If you just handed me a gift card, how am I going to get to that place the gift card is for? Do I spend to just under and write off that little bit extra, or do I wait until I have a little money to spend over?

The two most sought after items are socks for anyone, and pads for women. Yes, feminine hygiene pads. If you had no bathroom, no stuff, no money... what would you do for that one week every month? Besides cry.

Water is also important.

Pack in a big, clear zip bag, with an inventory at the front so they can see what's in there. For a container you can use a gallon ziploc, gently used purse, shoebox, or sock, but I say haul your privileged tushie to the store and buy zip bags big enough to fit your items in. Better yet, put it all in a backpack.

Pack this just like you would pack for yourself or your children. Put goods in zip bags. Keep food separate. Don't give used/opened items. Don't give really nice things that will get the person beat up and the item stolen.

Bonus item: Sympathy and encouragement. Nothing will touch you when you are in a hard place more than honest sympathy. Not condescension or pity, but a recognition that we all could end up in that same place. Take a moment to consider being in that situation. How many paychecks away from homelessness are you?

