ENLIST VOLUNTEERS’ HELP

Volunteers can be important allies in promoting selection of fresh produce and other healthy foods at your food shelf. Use them wisely.

What You Can Do Today

• Empower volunteers to assist clients in selecting healthy foods. Talk to them at the start of their shifts about their role in encouraging healthy eating, and why it's important. Remind volunteers to speak positively about healthy foods regardless of their personal experience or preferences. For example, a volunteer who dislikes broccoli could reassure clients who feel the same by saying something like: “I've heard several people say they like it roasted, and kids seem to prefer it when you sprinkle a little cheese on top or pair it with mac and cheese.”

Ideas in Action: Prime, Remind, Support

Train volunteers to “prime, remind, and support” clients to choose, prepare, and eat healthy foods. Here's how this strategy works:

• **Prime**—Other words for “prime” are “coach” and “prepare.” For you, this means coaching or preparing clients to choose healthy foods as they enter the food shelf. Upon arrival, inform a client about the fresh produce and other healthy foods available that day. Say something like: “Welcome – I'll be helping you today. Our fresh vegetables today are tomatoes and sweet potatoes. Think about whether you could use those ingredients in recipes at home. We also have some recipes featuring those ingredients we can give you.”

• **Remind**—Remind the client about the healthy foods when you come to that section. For example, say: “Here are those low-sodium beans I was telling you about. Do you think you might like to try some?” (Also point to related recipe cards or fliers you have printed out beforehand.)

• **Support**—Support the client in choosing, preparing, and eating healthy foods by suggesting preparation tips. For example, say: “Have you made whole wheat pasta before? You make it just like you make the other kind, and you can use the same sauce. Here's a recipe for spaghetti with a quick tomato sauce. Would you like to take a copy? We have all the ingredients in stock today. If you’re worried about your kids noticing the different flavor, you could start by mixing the whole wheat kind with regular pasta after it's cooked. Do you think that might work for you?”

This strategy is useful whether your food shelf offers clients a choice-based shopping experience or includes healthy options in boxes or bags of food prepared ahead of time. Even when clients get pre-boxed or bagged foods, a volunteer’s words can have an effect on which foods they prepare and eat at home.