

So you want to help the homeless or those less fortunate than you, but you don't want your efforts to be counterproductive. What should you put in homeless care Kits that will *actually* help a person in need?

10 Best Things to Put in Homeless Care Kits

For easy reference, here are some of the most-requested items, a "top ten" if you will:

1. Socks (this is the #1 most asked-for item)
2. Gloves
3. Water bottle
4. Bandages
5. Wet wipes
6. Toothbrush and toothpaste
7. Sunscreen
8. Nail clippers

WHAT TO PUT INSIDE

Clothing & Accessories

- **Socks.** Nice, high-quality, thick socks. Wool or thermal socks are best.
- **Gloves.** Again, one good quality item will be a much greater blessing than several low-cost items.
- **What to avoid:** Cheap socks, cheap gloves, and most clothing items in general. It is hard to judge a person's size, and there are many shelters and ministries that provide decent used clothing (*include a list of such places in your Kit*), but good socks and gloves are a huge necessity and much harder to come by than, say, a t-shirt.

Personal Hygiene

- Nail clippers
- Bandages (*large ones, especially useful for blisters*)
- Comb and/or brush
- Hand lotion
- Lip balm
- Face towels
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Wet wipes
- Maxi pads
- Chewable multivitamins
- Tissues

What to avoid: Soap, hand sanitizer, mouthwash, anything with fragrance, large items. Soap, because anywhere they can get a shower will likely offer soap. Hand sanitizer and mouthwash because they have alcoholic content and this is not a good idea for potential addicts. Fragrance, because it can be insulting and many people have sensitivities. Large items, because they're difficult to carry.

Miscellaneous Extras:

1. Headlamp flashlight
2. Flashlight
3. Hand warmers
4. Can opener
5. Quarters for laundry
6. Tarp
7. Sewing kit
8. First aid kit
9. Utensils
10. Ziploc bags

For each Kit:

1. Gallon plastic bag with zipper (1 x \$0.20)
2. Hand-written note card
3. Printout of local resources
4. Nice wool socks (1 x \$4-6)
5. Water bottle (1 x \$0.35)
6. Tuna cracker pack (1 x \$1)
7. Nail clippers (1 x \$0.50)
8. Large bandages (5 x \$0.15)
9. Individually wrapped wet wipes (5 x \$0.05)

Total size: 10" x 6" x 4" (approximate)

Total cost: \$7-10 per pack, depending on actual price and if you get bulk.

Let's take a little closer look at each item.

PLASTIC BAG

You'll want to start with a nice *zipper* plastic bag. Why the zipper? The regular types tend to stop sealing after opening and closing a few times. Spend the extra pennies to get the nice ones, and the person who receives this will get a bonus reusable bag they can use to store important personal effects after they use the items from the care kit.

HAND WRITTEN NOTE

It is very important, IMO, to write a note by hand. Why? It shows that you care. Just like a hand-written thank you note, hand-written invitations, or anything else. Write why you are giving this care kit, that you love, care for and value them. Just make sure you think through what you write so that your notes don't sound condescending.

LIST OF RESOURCES

Additionally, along with the note you can print a list of local homeless resources. Where they can get a hot meal or shower, a haircut, help with jobs or addiction recovery, a bed for the night, clothing, restrooms, and anything else. Contact the local shelters and ask them for recommendations. We listed the contact info for the nearest (*and to our knowledge, best*) shelter in the area and printed it, four to a page, then cut them out and slipped one into each card. The note

included some details of what the shelter offers – lodging, showers, food, haircuts, addiction recovery, etc.

NICE WOOL SOCKS

Once again, this is simply the #1 most needed item. Durable, warm, cozy, high-quality socks are a must for people who walk almost everywhere in the thickest boots they can find. You can go cheap on everything else, but don't skimp on the socks.

WATER BOTTLE

Proper hydration is difficult when you are out on the streets. A water bottle takes up a lot of space in your care package, but they can drink it right away or toss it if they need to. If they need the water, it is at very little cost to you and a huge, huge, immediate blessing. If they don't need it, again, very little cost and very easy to toss.

NAIL CLIPPERS

A simple tool that is easily taken for granted. You can get them at the dollar store or order in bulk online for less, and it will be a much-appreciated and used item.

LARGE BANDAGES

Primarily for blisters. Think: if you're on your feet all day, walking everywhere you need to go, how often are you going to get chafed skin, blister, and sores? Get a bulk pack of large 3-4" band aids and divide them up in little baggies to go inside all the homeless care kits you pack.

WET WIPES

Another no-brainer, once you think of it. A small, portable, handy, and appreciated luxury. Go for the individually wrapped ones.

Tips for great care packages

- **Try to keep the bags small.** Not everyone can carry around a lot of stuff, so aim for fewer but better items.
- **Write a personal note.** Write – in your own handwriting – a card that says their welfare is important to you, that they are loved, that they are valued, etc. Feel free to mention why you are doing this; perhaps because you've been there yourself, etc.
- **Include a list of resources.** Addresses for the local men's shelter, women's shelter, places to get meals, shelter, and showers, where to receive emergency medical services, and more. Contact your local shelter and ask them, as they're an invaluable resource with hands-on knowledge of the needs of the homeless in your area and what resources are available.
- **Take your time.** Pull the car over and get out and talk if you can. Ask their name, their story. A hand-delivered care package, a few minutes of conversation, a smile, genuine eye contact, all this can go a long ways towards showing someone that they're important, valued and loved.
- **Be safe.** Most homeless men and women are not dangerous. They are people just like anyone else. Still, it's wise to be in a group when handing out care packages, especially if you are going to stop and get out.

Food & Snacks

1. Water bottle
2. Beef jerky
3. Tuna salad and cracker packs
4. Peanut butter cracker packs
5. Breakfast/protein bars (watch out for melty chocolate)
6. Raisins, craisins, other dried fruit
7. Bananas – *soft food good for people with dental issues*
8. Mints
9. Tuna & cracker packs
10. Single-serving snacks like trail mix, nuts, crackers