



Women's Center & Shelter  
of Greater Pittsburgh

## Meal Preparation Guide

Updated September 2022





# Scheduling a Meal Prep

First time meal prep opportunities are typically scheduled 3-4 weeks in advance. This will give your group time to think through a menu, assign roles within your group, and submit all the necessary paperwork to WC&S.

## Days of the Week

Our greatest need for help preparing meals is **Monday through Thursday** when most of the residents and their children are here. We can also accommodate limited Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

## Timing

Typically, **lunch is served at 11:30am** and **dinner is served at 4:30pm**. We ask volunteers to arrive one hour before the scheduled meal time and to budget an hour for after the meal is served for packing up leftovers and cleaning. A typical lunch prep volunteer's schedule will look like this:

10:30am	Arrive at WC&S and begin prepping the meal.
11:30am	Lunch is served. Volunteers clean up and help serve.
12:00pm	Volunteers begin packing up any leftover ingredients and finish cleaning in the kitchen.
12:30pm	Volunteers leave WC&S

Timing is flexible, so if your group wants to prepare something ambitious or can't make it to WC&S right at the usual start time, let us know and we can talk through other options. If the meal is being served outside in our backyard space, volunteers are welcome to eat alongside the residents.

## Group Size

How many volunteers should you bring? The answer is: as many as you need. **Our kitchen can fit about eight people comfortably**, but please consider whether you'll have enough work for everyone. We want all of our volunteers to feel engaged and like they're contributing.



# Meal Planning

So what's for dinner? It's completely up to you! Whether it's a simple meal or a more ambitious cooking project, we're grateful for your help.

The number one rule of menu planning is to **give the residents options**. Everything we do at WC&S is about giving our clients meaningful choices, and meals are no exception. We've included some meal ideas below and you'll notice that almost all of them involve some element of choice.

## Meal Ideas

1. Tacos/Burritos
2. Hoagies (cold cuts, meatballs, sausage, etc.)
3. Soups & Sandwiches (for instance, grilled cheese and BLT sandwiches with two soups (tomato soup, potato soup, chicken noodle, chili, etc.)
4. Pittsburgh Salads (Chicken or steak, french fries, fresh vegetables and choice of dressings)
5. Stir Fry Buffet
6. Burgers/Hot Dogs and Fries

## Should I worry about dietary restrictions?

Women and kids are constantly arriving at and leaving our shelter, so it's hard to plan for food allergies and dietary restrictions in advance. Our best advice is to make it easy for residents to avoid common allergens and prohibited foods by:

- Planning a vegetarian option when possible;
- Serving cheese on the side instead of directly on foods; and
- Avoiding pork products and shellfish, or providing an alternative protein alongside them.

If for some reason a resident can't eat the meal you've prepared, that's okay. It happens. There is always plenty of food for our residents to eat in our fridges and pantry.





# Logistics of Preparing a Meal

## How Many to Plan For

The number of residents who attend meals varies greatly day to day. All kinds of things factor in to how many will show up for lunch or dinner, including time of day, day of the week, time of the year, and the weather, to name a few. So how many to plan for?

**Lunch: 15-25 adults and children**

**Dinner: 25-35 adults and children**

(We can usually count on about 15-25 residents attending dinner, but if your budget allows for it, we would appreciate you preparing food for all 35 of our residents so those who have meetings with therapists, lawyers, etc. can fix themselves a plate of leftovers when they get back!)

## What You Should Bring

- The ingredients;
- Your group; and
- Any specialty equipment that you've confirmed we don't have.

Some volunteers like to bring drinks or dessert with the meal. This is always appreciated but is completely optional.

## What We Have

WC&S has a fully stocked industrial kitchen that includes a six-burner stove, two ovens, a griddle, pots and pans, mixing bowls and storage containers, knives and cooking utensils, a microwave, fridges and freezers, and multiple sinks. We will also supply:

- Plates, bowls, eating utensils, napkins, cups, and other paper products;
- Cleaning supplies;
- Hair nets and gloves; and
- Drinks (we typically have milk, juice and water on hand).

## Food Service

Meals are served buffet style on the long counter between the cooking and dining area. We suggest setting it up so residents can serve themselves.



# What to Expect When Visiting WC&S

We want you and everyone you bring to WC&S to have a good time here. Here are some things to know:

## Who Can Volunteer in the Kitchen?

A common misconception is that only women can volunteer at WC&S. Anyone over 16 years of age can help out in the kitchen.

## Should I Talk to the Residents?

Absolutely. Though we can no longer offer volunteers the opportunity to eat alongside residents due to the risk of COVID-19, you are still welcome to talk with them while you're in the shelter space. However, we ask you to please:

- Keep the conversation light;
- Don't offer advice - domestic violence is a complicated issue, and our advocates undergo extensive training in trauma-informed care to learn how to support our residents; and
- While all clients of Women's Center & Shelter and their children are free and encouraged to practice their own religious beliefs, it is never appropriate to preach, evangelize, read scripture or distribute materials religious in nature while volunteering.

## Cell Phone Use

Due to our confidential location and the sensitive nature of our work, we ask that you turn off location services on your phone while at WC&S and refrain from:

- Taking photographs;
- Checking in at WC&S on social media;
- Using video messaging apps; and
- Taking calls on speaker phone.

A member of the WC&S staff will take photographs of your meal prep and send them to your group within a few days.





# Thank you!



Women's Center & Shelter  
of Greater Pittsburgh

P.O. Box 9024  
Pittsburgh, PA 15224  
(412) 687-8017