



NEWS RELEASE

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Tips on Sending Food Gifts to U.S. Military

With many U.S. military service personnel deployed to the Persian Gulf area, family and friends may be planning to send them a “care package” of foods from home. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers these suggestions for choosing food gifts to those serving overseas.

What to Consider:

- **Choose foods that are not perishable.** Perishable foods, such as meat, poultry, fish and soft cheeses, cannot be safely left at room temperature for more than 2 hours, so tolerating a week or more in the mail is unsafe. The USDA also cautions against sending high-moisture baked goods, such as pumpkin or banana breads, because they are susceptible to molds.
- **Choose foods that can tolerate a range of temperatures.** Avoid products containing chocolate, like chocolate chip cookies, which could melt in high temperatures.
- **Choose foods that won't break with rough handling.** Fragile foods such as delicate cookies probably won't make the trip intact.
- **For service members stationed in Persian Gulf countries,** do not send pork products or alcohol since they are forbidden for religious reasons.

Recommended Food Gifts

What can you send? Food safety specialists at USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline give these recommendations:

- Dried beef or poultry such as beef jerky, turkey jerky or beef slims are safe to mail. Bacteria can't grow in foods preserved by removing moisture.
- Dehydrated soups and drink mixes are lightweight and safe to mail.
- Condiments such as hot sauce and Cajun seasonings in packets or unbreakable jars are useful for spice lovers.
- Canned specialties such as corned beef, anchovies, shrimp, dips and cracker spreads make nice treats. Do not send foods in glass containers because they can break. Caution recipients not to eat food from any cans that are damaged or swollen when they arrive.
- Dense and dry baked goods such as ginger snaps and biscotti are good choices for mailing because they will not mold. Other suitable baked goods include commercially packaged cakes and cookies in airtight tins, stouffee cookies, and specialty crackers.
- Dried fruits such as raisins and apricots, canned nuts and fruit and commercially packaged trail mix are good choices since they do not need refrigeration.

- Hard candies and sturdy homemade sweets such as pralines and toffee are safe to mail because their high sugar content prevents bacterial growth.
- As an alternative to homemade gifts, send a military member's favorite mail order foods. Remember not to order any food gifts that must be kept refrigerated for safety.

Source: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/news/2003/military03.htm>