



50

tips, tricks and tools for sending a great care package



Veterans United
Home Loans

Introduction

Care packages are often one of the most important ways to cope with a loved one's deployment.

I try to support my spouse by holding things to-



gether here at home. But I always have a feeling of helplessness when my husband is stressed and missing home. As difficult as things are for me, I am not deployed to a war zone, thousands of miles from everything that is familiar and comforting.

Making a care package is a simple way to bridge the divide.

I spend a lot of time and thought putting together care packages, and as soon as I send one off I start working on the next. Planning and sending care packages keeps me busy thinking about how to make someone else feel better. Imagining the joy that it will bring soldiers overseas keeps me upbeat and positive.

Whether you are new to sending care packages or a seasoned veteran, check out these 50 tips, tricks and pieces of advice that I have collected over time. I hope you find them as valuable as I have.

— **Adrienne May, Military Spouse Central**

What to Send

1. Keep it personal

2. Get creative

Don't be afraid to make themed care packages or be a little cheesy.

3. Remember to send a letter

Letters from home are incredibly important and the most mentioned item by service members who are deployed. They want to hear about home!

Tips for writing a letter when you have run out of ideas:

- Keep a diary of your day so you have material when you sit down to write.
- Clip comics out of the newspaper and write a note about them.
- Recall a romantic memory.
- Talk about things that you are looking forward to doing together when your service member returns.
- Handwrite your letter. It's a truly personal touch that makes your presence seem more real.

4. Keep it light

You want your words to bring joy. Overly emotional or sad messages can upset soldiers.

5. Try not to embarrass

Think about the company that may be around when your spouse opens your package.

6. Perfume warning

Spraying just a single item with your perfume will often ensure everything in the box smells and tastes like perfume. If you want to send "your scent," lightly spray an item and seal it inside double Ziploc bags.



7. Think small

Keep the destination in mind. Most soldiers have no space to store large items. Send small reminders and consumables.

8. Batteries/battery-operated items

Ship batteries in new, unopened packages for quickest and safest arrival. Remove batteries from anything battery-operated before shipping.

9. Holidays

Upcoming holidays are a great time to get in the spirit. Be sure to include holiday decorations, toys and food.

Be sure to send holiday packages ahead of time. Care packages can take at least 10 days and up to six weeks during busy seasons like Christmas!

10. Send a disposable camera

Have your soldier send it back with a full load of pictures so you can develop and share them with family and friends.



11. Send something to share

You don't have to feed the whole unit but send at least one thing that can be easily shared.

12. Baby wipes

The most universally requested item for care packages.

13. Listen to your soldier

Ask soldiers what they need -- and what they don't.

- What cooking appliances can you access?
- What do you miss most from home?
- What do you crave?
- What do you need?
- What do you not need or have plenty of?
- What entertainment do you already have?

Food Items

14. Send items that have at least a six-week shelf life

15. Individually wrapped packages

More convenient for soldiers because they are portable and they stay fresher longer.

16. Consider preparation

Access to a stove, microwaves, oven, dishes, utensils and even can openers varies widely, so check with your soldier first.

17. Extreme temperatures

Afghanistan and Iraq can be 110 degrees in the summer and even during winter months the storage and transport facilities can be very hot. Do not send anything that will melt.

18. Home-baked goods

Consider baked goods from beginning to end. Pick ingredients and cookie recipes that stay fresh longer, are not fragile, and do not melt easily. Package carefully and creatively. For more tips on sending baked goods in a care package check out this article from Military Family Central: <http://www.veteransunited.com/family/4-tips-for-sending-baked-goods-in-a-care-package/>

19. Can openers

You might want to include a can opener or always choose flip-top lids on canned products because can openers can be hard to come by.

20. Condiments and Seasoning

Ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, spice blends, hot sauce and barbecue sauce all appear on “most wanted” lists. MREs and military dining halls are not known for exciting fare. The military prepares food for a large number of people. Most food is unseasoned. Many service members develop a strong love for spicy foods after a few months in the field.

Packing Your Package

21. Choose a sturdy box

Reusing a box is fine but make sure the box’s integrity hasn’t been compromised. Assume your box will be buried under a mountain of others and dropped about a dozen times. There’s no telling what kind of beating your care package will take on its way to your soldier. Prepare for the worst.



Mailed to Afghanistan, marked as Fragile

Dealing with the temperatures

Candy that has a hard coating seems to hold up best under extreme temperatures. Think jelly beans, Jolly Ranchers, Skittles, gum with the shell coating (and not in foil wrappers).

Don't send chocolate in summer months to Afghanistan or Iraq. The only thing worse than not being able to eat chocolate is having a bunch of your favorite chocolate candies smeared in an inedible melty mess.

If your soldier loves chocolate the alternatives are:

M&Ms: They don't hold up in the hottest heat, but until

the middle of summer they work some of the time.

Chocolate syrup: It's already liquid, and service members love putting it on all sorts of stuff.

Chocolate snack cakes, cake in a jar, chocolate cookies: These all can be packaged appropriately and still give chocolate flavor without the candy mess.

Think about how the heat makes flavors and scents blend. Mint and coffee are two major problem flavors. The factory-sealed bags you buy at the store will not stop the flavors from mixing. I once sent a bag of individually wrapped mint candies, and my husband wound up with mint-flavored beef jerky.

22. Use a small or mid-sized box

Smaller, lighter boxes arrive faster and are more likely to stay intact. As a rule: The smaller and lighter the box the faster it will get to its destination.

23. Get free boxes and materials

Get free boxes and materials sent to your home! You can always get free flat rate boxes from a U.S. Post office. You can also get a Military Care Kit sent to your home. The kit includes:

- 6 flat-rate Priority Mail boxes (medium and large sizes)
- 1 roll of packing tape
- 6 address labels
- 6 customs declarations forms with envelopes

Call the Postal Service's Expedited Package Supply Center at 1-800-610-8734 to request a Military Care Kit.

You need to select the option to place an order for "Express Mail, Priority Mail, or Global Express Guaranteed products."

Then just give them your name and address so they can send you the materials! [http://faq.usps.com/eCustomer/iq/usps/request.do?create=kb:USPSFAQ&view\(\)=c%5Bc_usps07261%5D&varset\(source\)=sourceType:embedded#kit](http://faq.usps.com/eCustomer/iq/usps/request.do?create=kb:USPSFAQ&view()=c%5Bc_usps07261%5D&varset(source)=sourceType:embedded#kit)



24. Consider using flat rate shipping

Flat rate shipping means you pay a flat rate for regardless of your package's weight. When sending heavier items you'll almost always save on shipping costs by using a flat rate box. When you are sending lighter items you may be better off choosing a standard shipping method. If you package correctly and make sure you choose the most effective shipping rate you can save quite a bit over a few care packages.

25. Pack items tightly

The less shifting and room for items to bump into each other the better.

The 4-year-old-on-Christmas-morning test

After you pack your box but before you permanently tape it up, give it a shake and a jostle and turn it upside down and around. If items are shifting around, add more items or filler material or choose a smaller box.

26. Wrap fragile items

Use bubble wrap to cushion anything breakable.

27. Pack food and hygiene items separately

Hygiene and food products would ideally be sent in two separate boxes. I'm always worried that chemicals or other things will leach into the food.

Tip: Vacuum sealers are very popular among longtime care package senders. They keep items fresh longer and keep spills, flavors and smells from blending.

28. Tape it

Be sure to securely seal the box from all sides. Tape along all of the seams. Use clear, brown or priority mail tape. You can't use too much tape. And believe me, your service member is a trained professional. He or she will still be able to get into the box.

29. Include an extra mailing label inside the box

Sometimes packages are damaged in transit or during an inspection and labels can become lost. If you include a label inside the Postal Service will ensure the package gets sent to the correct destination.

30. Send a plain box

It helps the shipping handlers to quickly and easily find the address on the package. Be careful if you're reusing old boxes. Boxes that shipped bleach or other chemicals may

not make it out of the United States due to shipping regulations.

31. Unobtrusive packages are less likely targets for theft

Many families and kids like to decorate the boxes, but I always advise that you decorate the inside of the box and not the outside. USPS/APO shipping is plagued with theft. The incidents that are reported indicate that packages are opened, items are removed and packages are resealed so it appears nothing happened. Try to keep your package from being picked out of the crowd.

32. Insuring or registering your package

Insured and registered mail packages will have to be picked up by your soldier at their base camp. Some soldiers may not travel to base camp often so talk to your soldier if you are sending a registered or insured package. Regardless of inconvenience, if you are sending an expensive item, insure it.

33. Calculate shipping costs online.

<http://postcalc.usps.gov/>

34. Size/weight rules:

Maximum weight is 70 lbs and maximum size (length plus girth) is 108 inches.

<https://www.usps.com/ship/can-you-ship-it.htm>



Addressing your Package

35. All packages must be addressed to a specific person

Many people still want to send packages to “any soldier” but post-9/11 security rules do not allow this.

36. Address packages correctly

Include the unit and the APO/FPO/DPO address with the nine-digit Zip code. Here are a few examples of how yours should look:

John Doe
Unit 2050 Box 4190
APO AP 96278-2050

Seaman Joseph Doe
USCGC Hamilton
FPO AP 96667-3931

Jane Doe
CMR 1250
APO AA 09045-1000

APO/FPO/MPO: How is this jumble of letters and numbers an address?

APO stands for “Army Post Office” and is associated with Army or Air Force installations. FPO stands for “Fleet Post Office” and is associated with Navy installations and ships.

MPO is less common and stands for “Military Post Office.”

It is normally followed by a number that serves as a code for a particular military unit or installation. APOs were often mobile and moved with the units to which they were attached. Instead of a country there is a two letter abbreviation: AA refers to “Armed Forces of the Americas”; AE refers to “Armed Forces of Europe”; and AP refers to “Armed Forces of the Pacific.”

It’s critical to write the address exactly as your service member gives it to you. For

more information, check out the U.S. Postal Service guidelines.

37. Don't write in the destination country

38. Use a black permanent marker for the address

39. Print the address in large block letters

40. Tape protection

Cover the address with clear packing tape to protect against moisture. [Might be good to find a picture as an example of this.]

41. Include a return address

Don't make your package a target

- Select a plain box with no markings on the outside
- Do not send huge, oversized boxes
- Do not mark your package as fragile
- Consider how you word item descriptions on your customs form and try to de-emphasize valuable or tempting items
- Insure all expensive items

42. List items in the package

The instructions say to list each specific item and that broad categories and general descriptions are not allowed. But senders often list categories like "snacks," and I've never heard of a case where it caused any problems. Listing specifics is something many people are wary of because the customs form is posted on the outside of the package. Listing specific items seems may tempt thieves.

43. Item's approximate weight

This is typically used for commercial shipping. While it has to be filled out, your accuracy matters very little.

44. Item's value

This is another area where many people warn against listing expensive items. There are some indications that listing

higher values does increase the risk of tampering and theft.

45. Redirect to address

Be sure to check this box and write in: "Any chaplain or commanding officer."

46. Don't tape the customs form to the package

It will be stamped by a postal worker and put in a plastic sleeve that adheres to the package.

Rules and Restrictions

47. Tobacco products are allowed

There is a lot of confusion surrounding this issue because of a law put in place in 2010 that bans mailing tobacco products. There are exceptions that still allow you to mail cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products to military personnel overseas.

48. Pork products

Most areas where soldiers are currently deployed do not allow you to send any pork or pork by-products. Check with your service member before sending anything with pork.

49. Sexually explicit material

This can include everything from a Victoria's Secret catalogue or a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition to personal photos. This material is considered contraband for military personnel. Be aware that packages are routinely inspected and if your service member is caught with it they could be disciplined.

50. Prohibited items

Some of the items that you are prohibited from sending are: aerosol cans, flammable materials, lottery tickets, alcohol, drug paraphernalia, fresh produce and live plants or seeds. You can see a full list of prohibited items by Zip code.

