



Social Security

Food Stamps And Other Nutrition Programs

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Food Stamps And Other Nutrition Programs

Federal, state and local governments provide many programs designed to help meet the nutritional needs of people with low incomes and their families.

Although Social Security does not manage any of these programs, we can refer you to the agencies that do. We have a special working relationship with social service agencies that run the food stamp program. In some cases, we can even take a food stamp application.

Can you get food stamps?

To get food stamps, you and the other people in your household must meet certain conditions. (Your household includes everyone who buys and prepares food together.)

Everyone who is applying in your household must have or apply for a Social Security number and be either a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, an American Indian born in Canada or Mexico or have status as a qualified alien. The following qualified aliens are eligible for food stamps without a waiting period:

- Legal immigrant children under 18;
- Blind or disabled legal immigrants who receive disability assistance or benefits;

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- Elderly individuals born on or before August 22, 1931, and who legally resided in the U.S. on August 22, 1996.
- Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR) with a military connection (includes Hmong or Highland Laotian tribes that helped the U.S. military during the Vietnam era, veterans, active duty, or a spouse or a child of a veteran or active duty service member);
- Refugees admitted under section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA);
- Asylees under section 208 of the INA;
- Immigrants whose deportation or removal is withheld under section 243(h) or 241(b)(3) of the INA;
- Cuban or Haitian entrants under section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980;
- Amerasian immigrants under section 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1988.

The following qualified aliens are eligible if they have lived in the U.S. for five years from date of entry or if they have a sufficient work history (40 work credits) to qualify:

- LPRs;
- Parolees (paroled for at least one year under section 212(d)(5) of INA);

- Conditional entrants under 203(a)(7) of INA in effect prior to April 1, 1980;
- A battered spouse, battered child or parent or child of a battered person with a petition pending under 204(a)(1)(A) or (B) or 244(a)(3) of INA.

If you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments in California, you are not eligible for food stamps because the state includes extra money in the amount it adds to the federal SSI payment.

Work

Most able-bodied people between the ages of 18 and 60 must register for work to qualify for food stamps. Many people may be required to participate in an employment or training program. Some college students also may be eligible.

Resource limits

Generally, your household cannot have more than \$2,000 in resources (things you own). But, if your household includes a disabled person or a person age 60 or older, the limit is \$3,000. The resources of a person who is getting SSI or benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program are not counted for food stamp

purposes either. Resources include cash, bank accounts and other property.

Not all resources count. For example, your home and the land it is on do not count for food stamp eligibility. A car or truck counts differently, depending on how it is used. Most states now use TANF rules in place of food stamp vehicle rules if the TANF rules are more beneficial to the food stamp household. Some states have also chosen to exclude certain resources excluded by TANF or Medicaid.

Most households also must meet an income limit. Certain things do not count and can be subtracted from your income. Your household may qualify for other income exclusions if it includes someone who is age 60 or older or disabled. The income limits vary by household size and may change each year.

What amount of food stamps can you get?

If your household is eligible, the amount of food stamps you get depends on your monthly household income and expenses for such things as:

- Mortgage or rent;
- Utilities; and
- Child care or elder care needed to allow someone to work.

Medical expenses of more than \$35 a month for elderly and disabled people are deducted from your household income if they are not paid for by another party such as Medicaid, Medicare or an insurance company.

You can also find out how much you may be able to get online through the Pre-Screening Tool at www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov.

How to apply for food stamps

Food stamp applications are available at any Social Security office. If you and everyone in your household are applying for or already getting SSI payments, **any Social Security office will help you fill out the food stamp application and send it to the food stamp office for you.**

All others must take or send their food stamp application to the local food stamp office or to any Social Security office where a food stamp representative works.

When you are interviewed, you also should have:

- Identification such as a driver's license, state ID, birth certificate or alien card;
- Proof of income for each member of your household, such as pay stubs or records that show if Social Security, SSI or a pension is received;

- Proof of how much you spend for child care;
- Rent receipts or proof of your mortgage payments;
- Records of your utility costs; and
- Medical bills for those members of your household age 60 or older, and for those who get government payments, like Social Security or SSI payments because they are disabled.

You should find out if you are eligible within 30 days. Households eligible for expedited service get benefits within seven days. If you do not hear within 30 days, call or visit the food stamp office.

Homeless people and food stamps

If you are homeless you can still get food stamps even if you do not have an address, a place to stay or a place to cook meals. You are considered homeless if you do not have a fixed regular nighttime residence or your primary nighttime residence is a temporary accommodation in:

- A supervised shelter;
- A halfway house;
- The residence of another person; or

- A place not designed for regular sleeping, such as a hallway, bus station or lobby.

Other nutrition programs available

The food stamp program is just one of many nutrition programs available. The federal government and many state and local government agencies sponsor numerous programs that provide people with information about, and access to, a more nutritious diet. Many of these programs also are set up to improve the health and eating habits of children.

Here are two examples:

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

- The WIC program provides nutritious foods to supplement the diets of low-income pregnant, postpartum and breast-feeding women, infants and children up to five years of age. It also provides nutrition education and referrals to health services and other assistance programs.
- WIC is administered by the Department of Agriculture through state health departments. Eligibility is based on income and on nutritional risk as determined by a health professional.

Contact your state or local health department for more information about this program.

Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP)

- NSIP (formerly Nutrition Program for the Elderly or NPE) is a food program designed to help older people. It is run by the Department of Health and Human Services through the state agencies on aging. NPE is part of the Grants for State and Community Programs on Aging, which also authorizes in-home services for frail elderly people, support services and senior center operations. The nutrition services program provides elderly Americans with nutritious meals.
- If you are age 60 or older, you are eligible for the program and so is your spouse, even if he or she is not 60 years old. Age is the only factor used to decide if you are eligible. You do not have to meet any income limits to get meals through the program.
- Neighborhood centers for the elderly serve well-balanced, hot or cold meals at least once a day, five days a week. When possible, transportation is offered to and from the sites for those who need it. Home-delivered meals, usually called "Meals on Wheels," are provided to elderly people who are homebound.

For more information about this program, contact your local Office

on Aging or ask your local Social Security office.

More food programs

There are other food programs administered by the Department of Agriculture.

Several food distribution programs give commodities to needy households or to organizations that provide meal service to low-income people, including soup kitchens, churches and homeless shelters.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program offers meals and snacks to children in eligible day care centers, family day care homes and other care centers, as well as to functionally impaired adults and elderly people in day care situations.

The School Lunch and Breakfast Programs offer meals at schools to children. Low-income children get these meals free or at a reduced price, while other children have access to reasonably priced meals.

The Summer Food Service Program offers free meals and snacks to needy children during the months when school is not in session.

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides low-income seniors (individuals who are at least 60 years old) with coupons during the harvest season that can be exchanged for eligible foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture programs.

For more information about these programs contact your local social services, health, agriculture, aging office or school.

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.



Food stamps

Getting or applying only for Social Security?

You can get a food stamp application and information at any Social Security office.

We cannot process your food stamp applications if you are getting or applying only for Social Security.

Getting or applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

You can apply for food stamps at any Social Security office if you and everyone in your household get or apply for SSI.

We will help you fill out the food stamp application. You do not have to go to the food stamp office to apply.



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