

# Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly Food Stamps)

*For people with disabilities*

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## **Agency Involved: *The USDA's Food & Nutrition Service***

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) develops and implements US national policy on farming, agriculture, forestry and food. Part of its mission is to promote agricultural production, assure "food safety," and end hunger in the US and abroad.

**The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)** is the agency within the USDA which runs the nation's domestic nutrition assistance programs. SNAP is one of fifteen programs managed by the FNS. Other programs include the National School Lunch and National School Breakfast programs; the Summer Food Service Program; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children; and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

## **Summary**

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The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (called Food Stamps until 2008) is the largest nutrition assistance program administered under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), although benefits are distributed by various social service agencies in different states. The program helps the elderly, people with disabilities, and those earning less (net income) than the poverty rate buy food.

For most of its history, the program issued paper-denominated "stamps" or coupons — worth \$1, \$5, or \$10 and bound into booklets of various amounts. In the late 1990s, state food stamp programs began converting to specialized debit cards called Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards. Beneficiaries can use these to purchase any prepackaged edible foods, regardless of nutritional value (e.g. soft drinks and confections). Benefits cannot be used to buy hot foods (such as those found in supermarket delis) or food from fast food restaurants.

In Missouri, the Family Support Division of the Department of Social Services administers the benefits through the SNAP program.

More details available at:

[www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/)  
[dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/](http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/)

## **Specific Benefits**

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SNAP funds can be used to buy most things we think of as food, including:

- breads and cereals
- fruits and vegetables
- meats, fish and poultry
- dairy products

- seeds and plants that produce food for the household

SNAP funds cannot be used to buy

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco
- Any nonfood items, such as
  - pet foods
  - soaps, paper products
  - household supplies
- Vitamins and medicines
- Food that will be eaten in the store where they are purchased (for example, eating in a restaurant)
- Hot foods

The specific amount of SNAP funds an individual or family receives is based on various factors of family size, income, and resources.

SNAP benefit calculations are based on the USDA's **Thrifty Food Plan** (from the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy & Promotion) which provides a base weekly rate of food expenses for families of different sizes. SNAP benefits are based on a comparison between the base weekly expense and the person or family's net income and expenses. A single individual can receive a maximum SNAP benefit of approximately \$200 per month. A family of four can receive up to approximately \$670, and a family of 8 up to approximately \$ 1,200 per month.

The Thrifty Food Plan also issues shopping guides and menus on how to make healthy, appetizing meals within the budget allotments calculated by the program.

More details available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap>  
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/usdafoodplanscostoffood.htm>  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/)

## ***Populations Served (eligibility)***

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Determining a person's eligibility for SNAP benefits can be very confusing, but there are several online tools and calculators to make it easier.

There are two stages of calculation before a person gets SNAP benefits. The first is an eligibility calculation and the second is a benefit amount calculation. An individual may be eligible for SNAP because he or she receives SSDI, for instance, but still have net income so far above the poverty level that there is no calculated need.

### ***Basic Eligibility***

There are three basic categories of eligibility for SNAP:

- People with little or no income
- People with disabilities
- People who are elderly (over 60 years of age)

Originally, low income was defined as families with a net income below the federal poverty level and with "countable resources" (e.g., checking or savings account, cash, stocks, and/or bonds) below \$2,000. However, starting in 2008, the USDA offered states an option for "broad based categorical eligibility" to increase the number of people who are eligible. This option is focused on families whose net income is well above the poverty level but who face such high heating and home rental costs that they still cannot afford food. The new option includes a range of strategies to help these families, including changing and simplifying the basic eligibility test, tying SNAP benefits to TANF benefits (either cash or non-cash benefits), and increasing the deductions for child care, heating, and rent used to calculate net income.

The adjusted eligibility calculations do not change benefits calculations.

As of 2013, Missouri has not adopted the broad based categorical eligibility option.

There are various online calculator tools and resources to help a person figure out if he or she is eligible for SNAP. A list of national eligibility resources is available on the [SNAP website](#). A national eligibility calculator is also available on the SNAP website (<http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>).

There is a Missouri-specific eligibility calculator on the [Missouri Department of Social Services website](#).

### *Benefits Calculations*

Calculations about how much money a person receives from SNAP for food are based on the USDA's **Thrifty Food Plan** (from the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy & Promotion) which provides a base weekly rate of food expenses for families of different sizes. The values from the Thrifty Food Plan are adjusted based on the calculated net income and resources of the person or family applying. These calculations can quickly become complex, so there are online benefits calculators associated with most of the eligibility calculators listed above.

### *Employment Requirements*

Unemployed adults between age 18 and 50 who do not have children and do not have a disability which keeps them from working can only get SNAP benefits for three months (in a three year period) unless they participate in one or more Employment and Training (E&T) programs. This can include registering for work, participating in a workfare program, being part of an employment and training program (not just a job search), and agreeing to accept any suitable employment offered. There are a few detailed exceptions in the national regulations and states have options to make their own exceptions. Some states have waived the employment requirement.

More details available at:

<http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/>  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/)  
[Missouri DFS Pamphlet on Food Stamp Work Requirements](#)  
[USDA's SNAP E&T Program Handbook](#)

## ***Definition of Disability***

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A person with a disability can be eligible for SNAP by meeting any of the following criteria:

- Receives SSI or SSDI due to a disability
- Receives State disability or blindness payments based on SSI rules
- Receives a disability retirement benefit from a governmental agency because of a permanent disability
- Receives an annuity under the Railroad Retirement Act AND is eligible for Medicare
- Is a veteran who is totally disabled, permanently housebound, or in need of regular aid and attendance
- Is a surviving spouse or child of a veteran who is receiving VA benefits and has a permanent disability

More details available at:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/eligibility.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/eligibility.htm)

## ***Criminal History***

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Federal rules ban anyone with a felony conviction involving illegal drugs (after August 22, 1996) from ever getting SNAP benefits. However, those rules also allow states to either modify that requirement (for example, only felonies involving drug sales) or remove it. As of 2012, 21 states have removed the lifetime ban and another 19 states had a modified ban in place. Missouri has kept the ban.

However, other felony convictions do not affect a person's eligibility for SNAP benefits.

More details available at:

[the FNS State Options Reports website](#)  
[Offender Reentry Council's Mythbuster sheet on SNAP](#)

## ***Substance Abuse***

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A history of substance abuse does not affect a person's eligibility for SNAP benefits unless there is a felony drug conviction.

In some states, a person with a felony conviction involving illegal drugs can become eligible for SNAP benefits if they participate in a substance abuse or addiction program. Missouri does not allow this.

More details available at:

[the FNS State Options Reports website](#)

## ***Application Process***

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Individuals apply for SNAP benefits by completing the application form for their state's program. Online application is available at the [USDA's SNAP website](#).

Once the application is processed, the local office may call the person, or the person may need to go to the local agency office for a face to face interview. Either way, they will need to provide documentation of their living situation and finances. Each state has slightly different document requirements, but some common ones include:

- A driver's license or state identification card
- A birth certificate
- Recent pay stubs
- Letter or documents from other social service agencies showing other benefits the person is getting, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), SSDI, Veterans benefits, child support, alimony, unemployment, retirement, etc.
- A rental agreement or letter from your landlord, or mortgage statement that shows the person's address
- Utility bills, such as electricity, gas, and water, for a typical month
- Cancelled checks for any daycare or child support payments
- Typical medical bills the person pays, especially if they are over 60 years old or have a disability
- Social security numbers for household members
- Documentation of disability status – either a statement from an agency like SSA or voc rehab, or a statement from a doctor
- Any documents about legal obligation to pay child support

The agency is required to make a decision within 30 days of the initial application. This includes following up with the person about any missing documentation or paperwork. If the applicant does not supply the missing information within the deadline, the application is denied. If the agency approves the person's application, the person should get benefits soon after, possibly within a few days.

In cases of urgent need, most states have options to get a person benefits within seven days.

### ***Semi-Annual Renewal***

In general, people getting SNAP benefits have to reapply or recertify every 6 months to a year, allowing the state agency to review whether they still meet eligibility requirements and make sure benefit amounts are still correct. In many states, benefit recipients can do this online without coming to the office.

More details available at:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/)  
[http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/  
Missouri's online application](http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/Missouri's_online_application)

## ***Insider Tips/Comments***

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- When you fill in the application form, be sure to fill in every blank. If something does not apply, put NA in the blank, but do not leave it empty.
- As soon as you submit your application form for SNAP benefits, call or go by the local agency office to set up an interview, rather than waiting for the office to contact you. It is probably better to go in person to make the appointment, if possible.
  - In Missouri, the entire process is done online or by phone and there is no need to come to the office for an interview.
  - If you are having an interview, when you schedule it, ask the person at the agency office for a written, detailed list of what paperwork you need to bring.
  - Arrive early for the interview and ask someone in the office to make copies of your paperwork and documentation. That way you can leave a copy with the SNAP agency case worker and keep the originals.
  - It is OK to ask a friend to come along. If you cannot get to the interview, ask for a phone interview.
- Be sure to get every item on the list of required documentation. If you need help, ask the SNAP agency staff, a family member, or a community service worker to help you.
  - People often forget the following documentation:
    - Pay stubs or other proof of gross income for the last 30 days
    - Documentation of unearned income, such as SSI, SSDI, and child support
    - Medical expenses (if they have a disability)
  - You can probably mail, fax, or scan and upload the documentation to the agency.
- If you are not approved, call or visit the SNAP office and ask why. If you think there was a mistake, you can ask to speak with the supervisor of the person who interviewed you or ask for a "fair hearing" review.

Recipients will have to update their information if anything changes and may have to periodically reapply for SNAP benefits.

## ***Typical Timeline***

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The agency is required to make a decision within 30 days of getting all the paperwork. If the agency approves the person's application, the person should get benefits soon after, usually within 7 to 10 days.

In cases of urgent need, most states have options to get a person benefits within seven days.

## Contact Information

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### National:

- USDA's SNAP website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>
- USDA's SNAP Eligibility Calculator: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>

### State:

- Missouri Family Support Division: <http://dss.mo.gov>
  - Food Stamp Case Information: 1-800-392-1261
- Missouri Food Stamp / SNAP Program: <http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/>

### Local:

- List of Missouri FSD Local Offices: <http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/office/list.htm>

## Web links for Independent research:

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- Missouri FSD Food Stamp Policy Manual: <http://dss.mo.gov/fsd/iman/fstamps/fstoc.html>
- USDA SNAP (Food Stamps) program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/>
- [List of all food assistance programs in the U.S. Government](#)
- [The non-profit Food Research & Action Center](#)

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