

Food & Nutrition Assistance For The Elderly

What Is The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is funded by the US Department of Agriculture. Ohio calls the program Food Assistance (FA). Your local County Department of Job & Family Services (CDJFS) determines your assistance group's (those persons potentially eligible or determined eligible to receive benefits together under one assistance group name) eligibility for FA including the monthly dollar amount of food assistance. CDJFS then issues a food assistance card called an EBT card (similar to a bank ATM or debit card) that is used to purchase food. The amount on the card is automatically renewed on the same day of each month.

How Do I Apply For Food Assistance?

You must file an application with your local CDJFS with a paper form, by phone, or online. The required information for the application is your printed name, address and signature on the form; other information can be submitted later. The paper form must then be mailed, faxed or submitted in person to CDJFS or an online form submitted electronically. When you apply, CDJFS must schedule an interview if you were not interviewed the same day your request is received. The interview may be by phone or in person. As part of the application process, CDJFS will also require you to provide documentation that verifies certain information.

What Verifications Will CDJFS Need?

To determine the correct amount of food assistance, you must submit proof of your assistance group's monthly gross income, such as wages, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and pension benefits before deductions. You will also need monthly bills, e.g., rent or mortgage, utilities, property taxes and non-reimbursable medical expenses.

What If I Cannot Travel To The CDJFS Office For The interview?

Federal law requires CDJFS to make reasonable accommodations for applicants with disabilities. If you are elderly or disabled and this prevents you from traveling to CDJFS, you can request that the mandatory application interview be conducted over the phone or in your home. No matter where the interview is held, be prepared to present all the information listed above. If the interview is conducted by phone, you will want to mail, fax, or electronically submit the information to CDJFS before the interview. Once CDJFS determines FA eligibility, the Ohio Direction Card (also known as the Electronic Benefit Transfer EBT card) is issued and sent to the individual or family's address. CDJFS can assist the recipient in finding someone to act as the assistance group's authorized representative.

How Does SNAP Define "Elderly" And "Disabled"?

An individual 60 years of age or older is defined as elderly. A disabled individual is someone with a disability considered permanent under the Social Security Act of 1935 or a nondisease-related,

severe, permanent disability. To qualify for special assistance group status, an elderly and disabled person must be unable to purchase and prepare food because of the disability.

Who Is Eligible?

The amount of monthly food assistance depends on your assistance group's size, income and resources, but special income and resource rules apply to assistance groups of elderly or disabled recipients. For example, a special income rule is that such assistance groups only need to be below a maximum net income to be eligible for FA, because the gross income maximum test does not apply.

What Is My Net Income?

Except for funds from the senior community service employment program and several other sources, most money from whatever source, earned or unearned, is countable gross monthly income. This includes wages, pensions, Social Security, VA benefits and money received from support or foster care. Then certain expenses are subtracted from your gross monthly income (allowable deductions) to determine your monthly net income.

Allowable deductions from gross income include a 20% deduction from gross earned income; a standard income deduction; a standard utility allowance if you pay heating or cooling expenses (currently \$746); for the elderly or disabled, all actual shelter costs that exceed 50% of net income after other deductions are deductible as well as non-reimbursable medical expenses that exceed \$35. Your monthly net income is then used to determine the amount of your monthly food assistance.

What Resources Are Counted For FA Eligibility?

An assistance group that contains a disabled or elderly member can have \$4,500 in countable resources. For all other assistance groups, the resource limit is \$3,000. Countable resources include liquid resources like cash, savings and checking accounts, savings certificates, and stocks or bonds. Nonliquid resources, such as personal property, land, buildings, and recreational property may be a countable resource if not otherwise excluded. The home and surrounding property, household and personal goods, vehicles in accordance with Ohio's temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) plan, cash value of one life insurance policy, one burial plot per assistance group member and one revocable funeral agreement per assistance group member are all exempt assets.

Who Is In My Household?

Your assistance group size depends on whether you purchase and prepare food alone or with other people. But special rules apply to assistance groups of elderly and disabled recipients. In general, if you: live alone; or live with others but purchase and prepare your food alone, apart from all others; or live with others whose combined income is not over 165% of the federal poverty level, you are elderly and disabled, and you are unable to purchase or prepare your own food then you may qualify as an assistance group of one. As an assistance group of one, FA only counts your income. However, if you live with others and purchase and prepare your food with them, your assistance group size will equal the total number of people living and eating together. The amount of food assistance will then be based upon the total income of all persons in the assistance group.

Where Can I Use an EBT Card?

You can use an EBT card at any store authorized to accept it. If you are elderly, disabled or homeless, you can also use your EBT card to pay for home-delivered Meals-on-Wheels and meals

served at authorized senior citizen or other communal dining facilities. An EBT card can only be used to purchase food or food products intended for human consumption, which includes seeds and plants to grow food.

How Soon Will I Receive an EBT Card?

If you qualify, you will be certified to receive an EBT card no more than 30 days after the day CDJFS receives your application. You will be informed of the date the benefits will be available. If you have very low income and assets, you can qualify earlier in certain circumstances.

What Should I Do If I Am Denied Food Assistance Or Think The Dollar Amount Is Wrong?

You may request a state hearing by calling, submitting a written request, or submitting an electronic request in accordance with directions in the decision you received within 90 days from the date the decision was mailed to you. A hearing request can be submitted at any time within a certification period to dispute the current level of benefits. If you are appealing a decision that reduces or terminates your food assistance, you may be able to have your current amount of food assistance continued during your appeal by filing a hearing request within 15 days of the mailing date on the notice you received that reduced or terminated your assistance.

Pro Seniors helps older Ohioans solve legal and long-term care problems and fight Medicare fraud. Our Legal Helpline provides free legal information and advice for Ohio residents aged 60 and older.

This fact sheet provides general information, not legal advice. The law is complex and changes frequently. Before you apply this information to a particular situation, call Pro Seniors' free Legal Helpline or consult an attorney in elder law.

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