

SNAP (Food Stamp Program)

What is SNAP?

Millions of older Americans on fixed incomes have difficulty getting food basics necessary for a proper diet. If you meet the income guidelines, the SNAP program (also known as food stamps) may help you stretch your food budget. SNAP is a federal program, run by state or local agencies, that provides funding for food and plants and seeds to grow food. SNAP benefits can be used like cash to buy eligible food items from authorized retailers. The program excludes nonfood items like alcoholic beverages, pet food, vitamins, medicines, tobacco, and cigarettes.

Who is eligible for SNAP?

Many think that the program is only designed to help the poor, but this is not true. Anyone, regardless of age, can apply for SNAP (not all may be eligible). You and the other people in your household must meet certain conditions, including the following:

- Everyone who is applying in your household must have a Social Security Number and be either a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or have status as a qualified alien.

- **You must be living in the State of Tennessee to get SNAP from Tennessee.**

To see if you are eligible, use the USDA prescreening tool at <https://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns>. If you live in the WTLS service area, call (731) 423-0616 or (800) 372-8346, and one of our intake paralegals can provide a SNAP screening.

What income is counted when I apply for SNAP benefits?

SNAP counts wages, self-employment, public assistance benefits, unemployment benefits, worker's compensation, child support, pensions, Social Security, and SSI. Excess medical expenses not covered by insurance can make an otherwise ineligible household eligible.

What are the asset requirements to get SNAP benefits?

Your household can have up to \$2,000 in liquid assets, like cash, savings, and CDs. If your household has at least one person who is 60 or older or is disabled, you can have liquid assets up to \$3,250. SNAP does not count your car, your home, personal belongings, household goods, furniture, clothing, life insurance, and burial sites.

How do I apply for SNAP benefits?

There are many ways to apply for SNAP benefits. Visit your local Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), request an application by phone by calling (866) 311-4287, or ask someone to get an application for you. You can also apply online at <https://faonlineapp.dhs.tn.gov/>.

If your household has little or no money and needs help right away, let the DHS know. You may be eligible under the “expedited service” rules to receive SNAP benefits within 7 days of the application date if you are classified as homeless or are a member of a low-income family.

What happens after I complete an application?

After you have turned in your application, a worker will hold a confidential interview with you or another member of your household. If you are asked to come to the DHS office, a friend or relative may go for you. If you are 65 or older, disabled, or suffer other hardships and cannot go to the office, let DHS know. A worker may arrange to interview you at home or by telephone. If the worker refuses to interview you at home or by telephone, contact your local legal aid office for help.

What do I bring to the interview?

You should bring proof of the following to your interview:

- Social Security Number;
- Identification;
- Income, both earned and unearned;
- Where you live;
- Shelter expenses, like rent or mortgage, taxes, and utility bills;
- Medical expenses for any elderly or disabled persons in your household;

- Daycare expenses; and
 - Court-ordered child support.
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What happens if I am awarded SNAP benefits?

A SNAP account is set up, and automatic deposits are made into the account each month. You will be issued an EBT card. Each time you use the EBT card, the amount of the purchase will be deducted from your SNAP account.

What if I am denied SNAP benefits?

If you think that your application has been wrongly denied or that you are not getting the right amount of SNAP benefits, you should tell DHS right away. You have the right to ask for a review by a hearing officer, but you must do so within 90 days from the date you get the notice about your SNAP benefits. You may have a friend or relative attend the hearing with you, or you may want the help of legal aid or a private attorney. In some cases, you can still get your regular SNAP benefits while you wait for the hearing

officer's decision. If the hearing officer agrees with you, you will get the correct amount of food stamps. If the hearing officer agrees with DHS, you will have to repay the value of any benefits you should not have received.

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