

SNAP benefits (Food Stamps)

What are SNAP benefits (Food Stamps)?

SNAP benefits are benefits that can help you buy food. Benefits are provided on an electronic benefit card, similar to a debit or credit card. Eligibility and benefit levels are based on household size, income, expenses and other factors. **Anyone can apply for SNAP benefits.**

How do I know if I qualify for SNAP benefits?

If your income (based on your family size) is less than or equal to the amount in the charts below, you *may* be eligible for SNAP benefits. **The only way to know for sure if your household is eligible for SNAP benefits is to apply.**

What counts as income?

“Income” means your household’s total gross monthly income before taxes and withholdings are subtracted. Certain household expenses, such as monthly Child Support payments also can be deducted from gross income when calculating your household’s income. Benefits from other assistance programs such as Unemployment Insurance Benefits, public assistance payments, Social Security or SSI benefits count as income.

What are the income guidelines?

Income Guidelines (no elderly or disabled member) Effective October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014 (130 Percent of the Poverty Level)		
Family Size	Monthly Gross Income	Annual Gross Income
1	\$1,245	\$ 14,940
2	\$ 1,681	\$ 20,172
3	\$ 2,116	\$ 25,392
4	\$ 2,552	\$ 30,624
5	\$ 2,987	\$ 35,844
6	\$ 3,423	\$ 41,076
7	\$ 3,858	\$ 46,296
8	\$ 4,294	\$ 51,528
Ea. Add. Person	+ \$436	+ \$5,232

Is there a resource limit for SNAP benefits?

There is only a resource limit for SNAP benefits if someone in the household has been disqualified or sanctioned for SNAP. If a household member is sanctioned or disqualified, then the household’s countable resources must not exceed \$2000.

Are there special guidelines for elderly or disabled people?

Yes. The income guidelines for elderly and disabled people are higher for SNAP benefits. You are considered disabled if the Social Security Administration says you are disabled. You are considered elderly if you are 60 years old or older.

Income Guidelines for Households with An Elderly or Disabled Member Effective October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014 (165 Percent of the Poverty Level)		
Family Size	Monthly Gross Income	Annual Gross Income
1	\$ 1,580	\$ 18,960
2	\$ 2,133	\$ 25,596
3	\$ 2,686	\$ 32,232
4	\$ 3,239	\$ 38,868
5	\$ 3,791	\$ 45,492
6	\$ 4,344	\$ 52,128
7	\$ 4,897	\$ 58,764
8	\$ 5,450	\$ 65,400
Ea. Add. Person	+ \$ 553	+ \$ 6,636

Are there resource limits for elderly or disabled people?

There is no resource test for households with elderly/disabled members whose income falls at or below the amount listed above, unless a member of the household has been sanctioned or disqualified from SNAP benefits. Households with elderly/disabled members who are sanctioned or disqualified and whose gross income exceeds these amounts, may still be eligible for SNAP benefits, if their countable resources do not exceed \$3250. Certain resources, like the home you live in, are excluded. If you have questions about resource exemptions, call our office at (716) 847-0650.

What is the maximum amount of SNAP benefits I can get?

The maximum amount depends on the household size, income and expenses. See the chart below for maximum allowances:

Maximum SNAP Benefit Allowances Effective November 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014	
Household Size	Maximum Allotment
1	\$ 189
2	\$ 347
3	\$ 497
4	\$ 632
5	\$ 750
6	\$ 900
7	\$ 995
8	\$ 1,137
Ea. Add. Member	+ \$142

How do I apply for SNAP benefits?

You can apply for SNAP benefits in several ways. You may either:

- Pick up an application at the Erie County Department of Social Services, on the first floor of the Rath Building at 95 Franklin Street, Buffalo, New York.

- Request that an application be mailed to you by calling (716) 858-8000 or writing to the Erie County Department of Social Services, Rath County Office Building, 95 Franklin Street, 8th Floor, Buffalo, NY 14202-3959.
- Apply online at <https://www.mybenefits.ny.gov/>
- Download the application at <http://otda.ny.gov/main/programs/applications/>
- Fax the application to 858-6834
- Apply at the kiosk on the third floor of the Rath Building, where you can file the application online.

Can someone apply for me?

If you have a physical or mental hardship, and are disabled, New York allows you to have someone you designate apply for you. You may also authorize someone who knows your household circumstances to apply for SNAP benefits for you. If you would like to authorize someone, print the person's name, address and phone number on the signature page (page 5) of your SNAP benefits application.

Can I apply by phone?

Anyone can be interviewed over the phone. If you apply in person, you will be scheduled for a phone interview (unless you qualify for expedited SNAP benefits). After you mail, fax, or submit your application online to DSS, a worker from the SNAP office will call you for an interview. If you are available, they will conduct the interview immediately over the phone. If you cannot be reached immediately, a letter will be sent to you scheduling you for a phone interview with a date and time. If you cannot be reached by phone at all, you will be scheduled for a face-to-face interview. During your interview, the worker will tell you what documents you need to provide, and they will send you a form with an envelope to return the required documents.

What are the required documents that I must provide?

You will be required to show proof of residency and proof of income. If you are applying for other specific costs like medical expenses, child support and/or dependent care, you will be required to show proof of these expenses as well.

What if I do not provide the required documents?

If you do not provide proof of residency and income, DSS will send you a denial letter outlining why your application was denied. If you receive a denial letter due to missing documents, you can still submit the missing documents, but they must be submitted within 60 days from the date you submitted your application. If you fail to submit the missing documents within the 60 day period, your application will be denied and you must re-apply for SNAP benefits.

How long before the SNAP benefits Office make its decision?

The food stamp office must make a decision on your application within 30 days of the date you submit it. They will usually issue SNAP benefits going back to the date of your application.

However, if you or someone in your household causes a delay, your application can be held open another 30 days. In this case, you will not get back benefits. If you delay completing the application for more than 60 days, your application can be denied.

For more information about how and where to apply, call 1-800-342-3009 and press "1" for SNAP benefits.

If I am a current SNAP benefits recipient, can I recertify by phone?

Yes. If you already get SNAP benefits in Erie County (as long as you do not also get Temporary Assistance benefits), you can recertify (renew your benefits) without going to the Rath Building. You no longer have to go to the Rath Building for recertification.

Where can I call for more information?

For more information on any of these methods of application or recertification, contact the Erie County Department of Social Services at (716) 858-8000 or the toll-free hotline at 1-800-342-3009.

What are Transitional SNAP benefits?

If your Temporary Assistance cash case closes, in most cases, you can still receive SNAP benefits, even if the reason that your case is closing is because you now have too much income to be eligible for SNAP. For most families leaving cash assistance, SNAP benefits can be continued – often at a higher amount than before – for five months.

What can I do if my application is denied?

Call our office immediately. We will review the decision with you. If it appears to be wrong, we will tell you how to challenge it, or we may agree to take your case. You must ask for a Fair Hearing to challenge the denial within 90 days from the date of the notice. To request a Fair Hearing, notify the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) by telephone, fax, or mail that you want a Fair Hearing. You can write on the back of your notice the reason for requesting the hearing. If you phone, get the name of the person you speak to. If you write, send your letter by certified mail and keep a copy. The correct address is:

New York State Office of
Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)
Office of Administrative Hearings
P.O. Box 1930
Albany, New York 12201-1930
Telephone No.: 1-800-342-3334
Fax No. (518) 473-6735 *(You must use the form from Albany)*

What if I have questions about SNAP benefits?

For further information about SNAP benefits, you can call Neighborhood Legal Services at (716) 847-0650.