

Getting Food Stamps in



The District of Columbia

2008 Edition

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D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

FOOD STAMPS: HELPING FAMILIES PURCHASE FOOD

WHY ARE FOOD STAMPS IMPORTANT?

More than 90,000 District residents benefit from Food Stamps each month and are able to buy more fresh produce, grains, meat, and dairy products at the grocery store. Even so, more than 20,000 residents – including many low-income workers, seniors, and immigrants – are not getting Food Stamps even though they qualify for benefits.

This means that many people are missing out on one way to stretch their food dollars and buy better food. As food prices, energy bills, and housing expenses increase, Food Stamps can be a huge help.

This guide will tell you the truth about the Food Stamp Program and give you the facts you need to apply quickly and easily.

Food Stamps are monthly funds that you can use to buy most foods. The average monthly benefit in the District is around \$100 per person. Most grocery stores, convenience stores, and corner stores accept Food Stamps. Your Food Stamps are not intended to pay for all of your groceries, but they will help you save some cash to put toward other food, rent, energy bills, child care, or things that you need.

The Food Stamp Program is the federal government's largest nutrition program. The program is not welfare. It is a good way to increase your food buying power. Your taxes have paid for the Food Stamp Program – we all have the right to apply for Food Stamps in times of need.



✓ THINK AGAIN

- Think you don't qualify for Food Stamps? Think again. Rules change, your situation may change -- you may be able to receive them.

✓ READ THIS

- Find out how Food Stamps can help you, how to apply for Food Stamps, and how to make sure your rights are respected.

✓ APPLY NOW

- Millions of Americans stretch their food dollars with Food Stamps -- Food Stamps really can help in times of need.

WHO FOOD STAMPS CAN HELP

WHO CAN RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS?

Generally, people who fall into one of these groups can get Food Stamps:

- U.S. citizens
- Many legal immigrants
- Citizen children of undocumented (illegal) immigrants
- Low-income workers
- People who are homeless
- People living in battered women's programs, community mental health programs, drug and alcohol treatment centers, and homeless shelters

People receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, or Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) automatically qualify for Food Stamps. You also may be able to receive Food Stamps if:

- You have few resources (like money in the bank); and
- You have little or no income (reasons might be because you work part-time or for low wages, are unemployed, get cash assistance, or are elderly or disabled and living on a small income).

Some people who usually cannot get Food Stamps are:

- Most people on strike
- All undocumented immigrants
- Most college and university students
- People who quit their jobs without good reason
- People who did not follow Food Stamp rules in the past

Generally, you can get Food Stamps if your income is below certain guidelines. To see if your income may qualify use the chart below.

1. Look at the number of people in your family ("Household Size").
2. Look at the number across from it.
3. Does your family's total monthly income before taxes fall at or below that number? If so, you may qualify for Food Stamps.
4. Households with seniors may be eligible even if their income is above the guidelines.

| INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND FOOD STAMP PROGRAMS | | |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| OCTOBER 1, 2008 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2009 | | |
| 130% OF FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL | | |
| HOW MUCH CAN I EARN? | | |
| Household Size | Gross Monthly Income | Gross Annual Income |
| 1 | \$1,127 | \$13,524 |
| 2 | 1,517 | 18,204 |
| 3 | 1,907 | 22,884 |
| 4 | 2,297 | 27,564 |
| 5 | 2,687 | 32,244 |
| 6 | 3,077 | 36,924 |
| 7 | 3,467 | 41,604 |
| 8 | 3,857 | 46,284 |

MORE INFORMATION ON FOOD STAMPS

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT FOOD STAMPS?

Households can have up to \$2,000 in resources (savings, stocks, pension funds, etc.) and still qualify for Food Stamps. This amount does not include the value of your car or home. Households that include an elderly member can have up to \$3,000 in resources. Beginning in October 2008, the resource limits (of \$2,000 and \$3,000) will be indexed to keep up with inflation.

As of October 2008, several changes have taken place that will help people receive more Food Stamps.

- The \$10 monthly minimum benefit will go up to \$14 over time.
- Certain households can deduct all of their child care (and dependant care) expenses. A deduction helps raise your Food Stamp benefit.
- All households with three or fewer members can take a higher standard deduction.

CAN IMMIGRANTS QUALIFY FOR FOOD STAMPS?

Yes. Some legal immigrants may be eligible to receive Food Stamps if they have been in the U.S. for at least five years. A few special classes of immigrants, such as refugees, asylees, and survivors of human trafficking, may be eligible for Food Stamps even if they came to the U.S. more recently,

Some legal immigrants who were removed from the program in the past due to their immigrant status may now be eligible again. Undocumented (illegal) immigrants have never been eligible for Food Stamps. This has not changed.

Applying for Food Stamps will not affect your immigration status or make you a "public charge." You can apply on behalf of your children who were born in the U.S., even if you yourself are not a U.S. citizen. In this case, you only have to provide social security numbers for your children. You do not have to provide your social security number or answer questions about your own immigration status.

ARE THERE SPECIAL RULES THAT MAKE IT EASIER FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO GET FOOD STAMPS?

Yes. There are many special rules that make it easier for seniors and persons with disabilities to get Food Stamps.

- **Income Limits:** Households with seniors or persons with disabilities may be eligible for the program even if their income is above the guidelines, especially if they have unreimbursed medical expenses or high shelter costs.
- **Resources:** Households that include an elderly member can have up to \$3,000 in resources, compared to \$2,000 for other households.
- **Re-Certification:** Unlike most households that have to recertify their Food Stamps every 12 months, elderly households only need to recertify their benefits every 24 months.
- **Interview Options:**
 - Applicants who prefer to have someone else do their Food Stamp

MORE INFORMATION ON FOOD STAMPS

application can assign an authorized representative. The representative can complete the Food Stamp application and go for the interview on behalf of the applicant.

- The applicant also can request a phone interview if he or she has difficulty getting to the Food Stamp office.
- **Household Size:** Typically, Food Stamp eligibility is based on all the people living in the household. However, a person 60 years or older who is living with others and cannot purchase and prepare his or her own meals due to a permanent disability can be considered a separate household. This rule applies as long as the others in the household have a very low income. By applying as a separate household, the elderly person (and his or her spouse), would likely receive a greater Food Stamp benefit.

WHAT CAN YOU BUY WITH FOOD STAMPS?

Food Stamps let people shop for food that they would not be able to buy without the extra money. You can use Food Stamps to buy uncooked food and seeds or plants for growing food.

Food Stamps cannot be used to buy:

- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Paper products; soap
- Vitamins and medicines
- Hot meals
- Pet food (except for assistive service pets)

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET FOOD STAMPS?

Once you complete and submit an application, you should receive written notice of whether you are eligible for Food Stamps within 30 days. However, if your budget is so squeezed that you have less than \$100 on hand and you are earning less than \$150 a month, you may qualify for "expedited" Food Stamps. That means you should get Food Stamps within one week.

HOW MUCH OF A FOOD STAMP BENEFIT WILL I GET?

The average Food Stamp benefit in D.C. is \$100.12 per person per month. To see the maximum Food Stamp benefit you could get, use the chart below.

1. Look at the number of people in your family ("Household Size").
2. Look at the number across from it. That is your maximum benefit.

| MAXIMUM FOOD STAMP BENEFIT LEVEL | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| OCTOBER 1, 2008 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2009 | |
| Household Size | Maximum Benefit |
| 1 | \$176 |
| 2 | 323 |
| 3 | 463 |
| 4 | 588 |
| 5 | 698 |
| 6 | 838 |
| 7 | 926 |
| 8 | 1058 |

HOW DO I APPLY?

Step 1: Get an Application

- Go to the nearest Food Stamp office. (See the end of this section for the address of an office near you.)
- Call your local Food Stamp office and asking them to mail you an application.
- Go online to <http://www.dhs.dc.gov/>, then underneath "SERVICES," click on "Application for Benefits." Download the application.
- Visit the D.C. Hunger Solutions website at www.dchunger.org, clicking on "Anti-Hunger Programs," and then on "Food Stamps."

Step 2: Complete Your Application and Turn It In

- Fill out your application as best as you can.
- Start gathering as much documentation as you can, such as an ID card like a driver's license or other photo ID, where you live, and how much you earn. See a handy checklist on page 11. These materials are not required to start the application process, but having all of this information with you may prevent you from having to go back to the office multiple times.
- Take the application to a Food Stamp office.
- You also may mail your application to the office, but this may take longer to process.

TIP: You have the right to bring your Food Stamp application to any District office, but if possible, bring it to the office nearest your home. There are seven Food Stamps offices in the District. A list is available at the end of this section.

TIP: Turn in your application even if it is not complete. Turning in an application with just a name, signature, and address will "start the clock," making sure the Food Stamp office starts working on your application, so you can get your Food Stamps as soon as possible and dating back to the date you turned in your application.

Step 3: Apply and Talk With a Case Worker

- Go to a Food Stamp office.
- When you arrive at the Food Stamp office to turn in your application, you will be assigned a case worker who will help you apply for Food Stamps and other programs that can assist you.
- Meet with the case worker that same day. Ask him or her any questions you have. He or she will help you fill out your application if it is not complete and ask you questions about information you've provided or left off. Make sure to ask about reporting and recertification requirements.
- Turn in your application.
- Keep your caseworker's contact information handy by writing it down.

TIP: If you arrive when the office opens at 8:15a.m. (or sometimes even at 7:30a.m.), you may have to wait less time to see someone.

HOW TO APPLY FOR FOOD STAMPS

TIP: If it is hard for you to go to the office in person, ask someone to go to the interview for you or ask for a phone interview. Look on the next page for more information on how this works.

TIP: If you can, make copies of everything you submit and try to keep everything handy, because you may need them again. Keep a list of the people you talk to. Know how to call your case worker.

Step 4: Submit any Other Information your Caseworker Asks for

- Usually, applicants do not have all of the documents they need to complete the application the first time they go to the office.
- Your case worker should tell you what other information you need to bring in and will ask you to return within 30 days. Bring it in as soon as possible since the office cannot tell whether you are eligible until you bring all the information.
- **Do not forget this step.** Your application will not be processed until all your information is received. If you wait too long, your case will be closed and you will have to start the application process all over again.

Step 5: Find Out if Your Application for Food Stamps was Approved

- Once your application is complete, the Food Stamp office will send you a letter within 30 days (or 7 if you qualify for "expedited" Food Stamps) to let you know if you qualify.
- If you qualify, you will need to go to an EBT card training center to learn how to use your Food Stamp benefits.
- If you don't receive a letter from the Food Stamp office telling you whether or not you qualify, call your caseworker.

Step 6: Attend the EBT Card Training

- You must attend this training to begin getting Food Stamps. It will help you understand how to use them. The training takes 15 to 20 minutes.
- At the end of the training, you will be issued an EBT card. It will have your Food Stamps on it.
- Use your EBT card to buy food, just like you would use a credit or debit card.

TIP: Food Stamps are no longer distributed in paper form. Instead you will receive a plastic card called an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.

Step 7: Keep Up With the Program

- Be sure to follow reporting requirements. Food Stamp customers are required to tell the Food Stamp office about certain changes (for example, changes in income). You should receive a form telling you what changes you have to report.
- To report a change, call the IMA Change Center at (202) 727-5355.
- If your case worker asks you to enter the employment program, you will receive a letter with a time and date to go for job training. Some but not all Food Stamp customers have to do this.

Step 8: Be Aware of When You Have to Re-apply

- As of February 2008, most clients are approved for Food Stamps for 12 months. This saves clients the need to re-apply on a 6-month basis. But, this does NOT mean that clients can wait 12 months before contacting the Food Stamp office. Instead, the office will send you a form at the end of your fourth month. **Be sure to answer the questions, sign, and return the form. If you do not, your Food Stamps will be cut off.**
- NOTE: Seniors and persons with disabilities are typically approved for Food Stamps for 24 months, and homeless households are typically approved for 6 months.
- About two months before your Food Stamps are supposed to end, you will receive a letter in the mail telling you a date to come in to the office to re-apply. If you cannot go to the office on that day, you can call to reschedule.
- When you go to the Food Stamp office, you should take all of your documents, just like you did when you applied the first time. The Food Stamp office will want current information on what you earn and where you live. For a handy list of documents to take with you, see page 11.
- Be sure to re-apply on time so that your Food Stamps keep coming without a break.

TIP: The Food Stamp office will send you a reminder to reapply, but try not to cut it close! Setting up an interview in advance makes sure your benefits keep coming on time.

Any Problems? See the end of this section for a list of places that can help you. The Food Stamp office will also do their best to help you.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS DURING A FOOD STAMP INTERVIEW?

When you go to the Food Stamp office to apply for Food Stamps, you have the right to:

- Get the forms on the same day you ask for them.
- Be screened to see if you can receive “expedited” Food Stamps, which you can get in 7 days.
- Fill in only your name, address, telephone number, and signature before handing in your one-page application (you can finish it later).
- File your application the day that you get it, at any time during office hours.
- Get a list of documents you will need to complete your application.
- Get help from someone who speaks your primary language.
- Submit the application at any office

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES?

When you are dealing with the Food Stamp office, you should:

- Give true and complete information. If you give false information, you may lose your benefits. You also could face other consequences, such as fines or, in rare cases, criminal proceedings.
- Tell your caseworker about any changes that they ask you to report, including changes in income or who is in your household.
- Keep your appointments at the Food Stamp office.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MY CASE WORKER?

At your initial interview, your case worker should:

- Tell you the program rules and explain them.
- Ask you questions to complete your application.
- Give you a list with examples of the kinds of documents or contacts you can use to prove your income, your expenses, who is in your household, and who you are.
- Ask you to show or collect the information on the list.

TIP: At your interview, make sure that you ask questions about things that you don't understand. It is important that you know what you will have to do to get Food Stamps.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CANNOT MAKE IT TO THE FOOD STAMP OFFICE?

If you cannot make it to the Food Stamp office, you can assign someone to be your authorized representative. Your authorized representative should be someone you trust. All you need to do is to check the boxes on the Food Stamp application that lets someone act on your behalf. You can have that person:

- Attend the interview,
- File your paperwork, or
- Use your EBT card for you.

If you cannot attend the interview or get to the Food Stamp office because you have a disability or are a senior citizen, you can request a phone interview. **You can also ask for a phone interview if you cannot get to the office because of work or some other hardship.**

FOOD STAMP OFFICES

The D.C. Department of Human Services Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) administers the Food Stamp Program. If you are not sure which office is nearest to you, call IMA at (202) 724-5506 and they will tell you.

DISTRICT FOOD STAMP OFFICES

Anacostia

2100 Martin Luther King Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020
Phone: (202) 645-4614
Fax: (202) 727-3527

Congress Heights

4001 South Capitol Street, SW
Washington, DC 20032
Phone: (202) 645-4546
Fax: (202) 645-4524

H Street

645 H Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 698-4350
Fax: (202) 724-8964

Fort Davis

3851 Alabama Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020
Phone: (202) 645-4500
Fax: (202) 645-6205

Eckington

51 N Street, NE, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 724-8720
Fax: (202) 724-8602

Taylor Street

1207 Taylor Street, NW
Washington, DC 20011
Phone: (202) 576-8000
Fax: (202) 576-8740

Northeast

3917 Minnesota Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20019
Phone: (202) 724-7900
Fax: (202) 724-8549

* This office NOT open for
extended Wednesday hours



**The offices are open Monday through
Friday from 8:15 AM – 4:45 PM, and
Wednesday from 8:15 AM – 8 PM.**

How DCHS can help:

D.C. Hunger Solutions (DCHS) provides information, printed materials, presentations, and trainings on the Food Stamp Program for individuals, community groups, and social service providers. Presentations include information on local rules and income guidelines, and assistance to avoid some of the potential problems encountered by applicants. DCHS staff provides benefit pre-screenings, which are intended to give people an idea of whether or not they will qualify for Food Stamps. Feel free to call us, or any of the other organizations below, for help.

D.C. Hunger Solutions

1875 Connecticut Ave, NW
Suite 540
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 986-2200, ex. 3023

Bread for the City

1525 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
Phone: (202) 265-2400

1640 Good Hope Road, SE

Washington, DC 20020
Phone: (202) 561-8587
Fax: (202) 574-1536

Capitol Area Food Bank

645 Taylor Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
Phone: (202) 526-5344

D.C. Legal Aid Society

1331 H Street, NW
Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 628-1161

Neighborhood Legal Services

701 Fourth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 682-2700

3101 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, SE

Washington, DC 20032
(202) 678-2000

Whitman Walker Clinic

2301 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20020
(202) 678-8877

FOOD STAMP APPLICATION CHECKLIST

CHECKLIST OF DOCUMENTS YOU SHOULD TAKE WITH YOU TO THE FOOD STAMP OFFICE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

For the IMA to accept your application, all you need to fill in is your name, address and signature. You can provide the rest of the documentation below at your interview.

Proof of Identity – Bring a photo ID. If you don't have a photo ID, you can bring along a friend, neighbor, or family member who can verify your name and identity.

Proof that you live in D.C. - Bring a recent rent receipt, copy of your lease, mortgage payment, or your landlord's name and phone number. Or, you can bring a signed letter from a person you live with stating that you live at that address.

Proof of Income - Proof of income for ALL sources of income for ALL members of the household such as your last 3 pay stubs, letters from Social Security, VA benefits, educational scholarships, grants or loans, unemployment payments, or your employer's name and phone number.

Proof of Housing Expenses - Bring recent rent or mortgage payment receipts. Bring receipts of all recent utility bill(s): phone, gas, electric, and water. Be sure that all of these documents have your address printed on them.

Bank Statements - If you have an account at a bank or credit union, bring a recent bank statement or bankbook. Also if you have any other type of financial account (for example, a CD) be sure to bring that, too.

Income and Other Deductions - You may claim all dependent care costs (child, elderly, invalid, etc.). If you are 60 years or over or receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits or Social Security Disability payments, bring proof of any medical or dental expenses you might have.

Social Security Number (SSN) - Bring your Social Security Card. If you are applying for someone else, you should bring their card. If you do not have a card you can also bring a driver's license, pay stub, unemployment statement, or Social Security Income Award Letter, as long as it has your SSN on it.

Proof of Immigration Status - If you do not have a social security number, you must provide your Alien ID Number. You should bring the immigration and naturalization papers for yourself or whomever you are applying for. Your papers are not required if you only are applying for your children who were born in the United States.

Proof of any Assets - Bring proof of ownership for buildings, land, policies, burial arrangements or plots, and/or other property (not your home that you stay in) you reported in your application.

