

# FACT SHEET

## Food Assistance Benefits

### Food Assistance Benefits

The Food Assistance program is designed to raise nutritional levels, to expand buying power and to safeguard the health and well-being of individuals in low income households in Ohio. A household may consist of an individual or a group of individuals who live together and usually purchase, prepare and eat their food together.

### Electronic Benefits Transfer

Electronic Benefits Transfer or EBT, allows individuals to receive food assistance benefits and purchase their food electronically. The benefits are deposited into the recipients' accounts each month. Using magnetic stripe cards similar to debit cards, recipients swipe their cards through Point of Sale devices in grocery stores at checkout counters. After entering a PIN (Personal Identification Number), the amount of the food is deducted electronically from the recipients' food assistance accounts.

### Who can get food assistance benefits?

A person may qualify for benefits if the household's gross monthly income is within 130% of the federal poverty guidelines after all allowable expenses are deducted. Expenses can include rent/mortgage, gas, electric, water, sewer, phone, child support, medical expenses, child care, etc. Eligibility also depends on the number of people in the household, and whether they purchase, prepare and eat together. In some situations, the person's resources such as cash, savings, stocks, and etc. are also considered when determining whether someone is eligible.

There is a pre-screening tool for individuals to use to see if their household may be eligible for food assistance: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns>. This is not an application for benefits. Individuals must apply for food assistance with their local county departments of job and family services. A list of county departments of job and family services can be found at <http://jfs.ohio.gov/county/cntydir.stm>

### What are allowable expenses?

Allowable expenses include medical expenses for individuals 60 years of age or older; or who are considered disabled; dependent care expenses; legally-obligated child support; and shelter costs such as rent, mortgage, property taxes, gas and electric.

### What needs to be verified?

Items such as income and expenses will require verification at the time of application. Normal processing requires that benefits be issued or the application denied within 30 days after the date the application is filed. But if the household has little or no income and resources, the household may be eligible to receive benefits right away even if all of the information can not be verified quickly. However, identification is required at the time of application.

### How often is your situation reviewed?

Depending on the household's situation, a review (recertification) of continued eligibility for food assistance benefits is generally required every 6 to 12 months. Reviews will occur more often if the household is experiencing a lot of changes or has earned income. Elderly and disabled households with no earned income will have a review of their eligibility once every 24 months.

### What can be bought with food assistance benefits?

Food assistance benefits can be used to buy most food or food products intended for human consumption. Items which may not be purchased with food assistance include alcoholic beverages, tobacco, hot food and hot food products that are prepared to be eaten immediately. Individuals who receive food assistance benefits may not sell or trade food assistance benefits, buy nonfood items or use food assistance benefits to buy food for someone who is not a member of the household.

**Note: This is only basic information. An accurate determination of eligibility for food assistance requires an application be filed and an interview be conducted regarding each household's specific situation. Contact your local county department of job and family services.**

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