Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program  
(formerly Food Stamps)

What is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

This is a federal program that gives households benefits that can be used just like money to buy food. Benefits are given in a card by electronic benefit transfer (EBT). In Virginia, the EBT card is called the “Cardinal Card.” Benefits are given to a household – a group of people who buy and prepare food together. They do not have to be related to each other or share their income. Parents and their children under age 22 who live together always will be a household.

Who can get SNAP benefits?

Households must have low resources (property) and low income to get SNAP benefits. All households can have up to $2,000 in countable resources. Households of two or more can have up to $3,000 in countable resources, if at least one person elderly (60 or older) or disabled. Your home you live in, household goods, furniture, clothing, and motor vehicles are not counted.

What are the income limits to get SNAP benefits?

Income limits depend on household size. The more people in the household, the more the monthly income limit. Households with an elderly or disabled member must have net income after deductions at or below 100% of poverty. Households without an elderly or disabled member must have gross income before deductions at or below 130% of poverty and net income after deductions at or below 100% of poverty.

What are the deductions?

To figure monthly net income, households add up income and subtract deductions. There are six possible deductions. Deduction amounts change over time. From October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012, these are the deductions.

1. Standard - $145/month, if 1-3 in household, $155/month if 4 in household, $181/month if 5 in household, $208/month if 6 or more in household
2. Work - 20 percent of wages from a job.
3. Medical - Household members who are 60 or older, or who get Social Security or SSI benefits, can deduct their out-of-pocket medical expenses greater than $35 per month.
4. Child Care - Expenses to care for a child or other dependent so a household member can work.
5. Legally owed child support payments.
6. Shelter - Housing and utility expenses greater than 50 percent of income after all other deductions are subtracted. The maximum amount of shelter expenses that can be deducted is $459/month, unless the household has an elderly or disabled member.

**What can I buy with SNAP benefits?**

You can use SNAP benefits to buy food or seeds and plants to grow food in your home garden. You cannot use SNAP benefits to buy these items.

- Alcoholic beverages or tobacco.
- Hot foods ready for immediate consumption or foods to be eaten on the store premises.
- Pet foods.
- Soap or paper products or other non-food items.
- You cannot use SNAP benefits to pay back grocery bills.

At the checkout counter, tell the cashier beforehand that you will pay with the Cardinal Card. You may need to separate the items you can pay for with SNAP benefits from other items. You will not be charged sales tax on food items or meals purchased with SNAP benefits.

**How do I apply for SNAP benefits?**

You apply for SNAP benefits at your county or city’s Department of Social Services (DSS). You have the right to apply the same day you go into the office. DSS may ask for written proof (verification) only about your income, liquid resources (checking or savings account), medical costs, utility costs and Social Security numbers. DSS may not ask for written proof of anything else unless they have a good reason to question it.

People eligible for SNAP benefits, must get them within 30 days after application. Those who are “destitute” must get SNAP benefits within 7 days after application. (Destitute means either 1) gross monthly income less than $150 and liquid resources less than $100, or 2) gross monthly income plus liquid resources are less than monthly shelter expenses.)

**How do I appeal a decision about SNAP benefits I disagree with?**

If SNAP benefits are denied, reduced or ended, or if you disagree with any action taken on your SNAP benefits case, you may file an appeal by asking DSS for a fair hearing. You may ask for this orally, but it is better if you to do it in writing. You must file an appeal within 90 days of the action. In a SNAP benefits termination case, if you appeal within 10 days, you may be able to keep getting SNAP benefits on appeal.

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