
Food Resources

“Food insecurity” is a lack of consistent access to enough food.¹ Many people experience food insecurity because of low income, lack of affordable housing, social isolation, health problems, and rising medical costs.² Having enough food and nutrients is vital for your health and well-being. Here is a list of resources to support your access to food in the United States.

Food Banks and Food Pantries

How it works: Food banks gather and store food, then distribute it to food pantries, soup kitchens, backpack programs, and other groups that assist the public.³ Pantries are located in churches, missions, schools, and other areas in the community. Backpack programs partner with schools and other groups to send kids home with food for weekends and school breaks.⁴

Who can apply: Some pantries check income level or require proof that you are a resident of the area. Others are open to anyone.³ School staff often identify which kids most need food backpacks.⁴

Websites: [Feeding America](#), [FoodPantries.org](#)

National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

How it works: Eligible children receive free or reduced-price nutritious lunches and breakfasts during the school day.^{5,6} The programs are offered at most public schools and some nonprofit private schools.^{7,8}

Who can apply: Free meals are available to children of families with income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level. Reduced-price meals are available to those with income between 130% to 185% of the poverty level.⁹

Website: [National School Lunch Program](#)

Summer Food Service Program

How it works: It offers free, nutritious meals and snacks to children and teens at a central site in low-income areas when school is not in session. Sites may be in various places, such as schools, community centers, and parks.¹⁰

Who can apply: Children 18 and under in low-income areas can participate. Half or more of the children the site serves must be from families at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.¹¹

Website: [Summer Food Service Program](#)

Missing Out on Available Food Resources?

Sometimes a lack of awareness of the food assistance programs described in this handout causes people to miss out on valuable support. For example:³²

- Only a small portion of children who participate in the National School Lunch Program during the school year also participate in summer meal programs.
- Almost one in five people who are eligible for SNAP don't participate in an average month.
- Less than six out of 10 people eligible for WIC are enrolled in the program.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

How it works: Eligible elementary schools serve all students a free snack of fresh fruits or vegetables during the school day. The fresh snacks are generally given on two or more days per week.¹²

Who can apply: The program is available at select schools already offering the National School Lunch Program. Elementary schools selected to offer the program are those with the highest percentage of children eligible to receive free or reduced-cost school meals.¹²

Website: [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#)

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

How it works: It provides monthly benefits to purchase food at grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food retailers that accept SNAP. Funds are loaded onto an electronic benefits transfer card. The average benefit is \$195 a month per person.^{13,14}

Who can apply: Generally, households with income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level and assets below certain limits are eligible. There are restrictions on which non-citizens are eligible.¹³

Website: [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

How it works: Eligible people receive monthly funds on WIC benefit cards to buy infant formula and specific nutritious foods. WIC also offers support for breastfeeding, nutrition education, and healthcare referrals.¹⁵

Who can apply: Nutritionally at-risk pregnant, breastfeeding/chestfeeding, and postpartum people, as well as infants and children under age 5, are eligible if they are at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.^{16,17} Medicaid and SNAP recipients automatically meet income limits.¹⁸

Website: [How to Apply to WIC](#)

Farmers Market Nutrition Programs

How it works: It provides coupons that can be exchanged for certain foods at participating farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Eligible foods include unprepared vegetables, fruits, and herbs.^{19,20}

Who can apply: In participating states, WIC users are given farmers market coupons alongside their regular benefits. Adults age 60 and older who have household incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level can apply to the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program, available in most states.^{21,22}

Websites: [WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#), [Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#)

Unsure Where to Start?

Here are some resources to help you identify food programs available in your area of the United States:

- **USDA National Hunger Hotline.** Call 866-348-6479 for help finding local government food assistance programs and emergency food providers.³³ For an online listing by state, region, or tribe, visit the [Food and Nutrition Service Contacts website](#).³⁴
- **211.** Call 211 from a cell phone or landline to speak with someone about locating food assistance resources in your area.³⁵
- **No Kid Hungry.** Provides an [online locator](#) for free meals for kids. You can also text the word FOOD to 304-304 to find local food programs for kids. (Data and message rates may apply.)³⁶

Meals on Wheels

How it works: It delivers hot, nutritious weekday lunches to homebound adults. Meals are also served at senior centers or other community facilities for those who are mobile enough to attend.²³

Who can apply: Generally, the program serves adults 60 and over, but this can vary by program. Meals range from no cost to full price based on a sliding fee scale. The process starts by applying to your local program.²³

Website: [Meals on Wheels](#)

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

How it works: Eligible older adults receive a free monthly package of USDA foods. Examples of foods provided are oats, rice, dry beans, pasta, canned meat, peanut butter, shelf-stable milk, and canned fruits and vegetables.²⁴

Who can apply: Participants must be at least 60 years old and at or below 130% of the federal poverty level. Some states may also require a person to be at nutritional risk.²⁵

Website: [Commodity Supplemental Food Program](#)

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

How it works: It provides emergency food assistance at no cost to people with low income, including older adults. Food banks participating in the emergency assistance program distribute USDA foods to food pantries and soup kitchens that directly assist the public.^{26,27}

Who can apply: Eligibility to receive free food depends on your income level. Income limits vary with the state you live in. There are no income limits if you eat prepared meals served in specific group settings for those in need.²⁸

Website: [The Emergency Food Assistance Program](#)

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

How it works: Households living on reservations and other Native Americans living in approved areas can receive free USDA foods. Certain traditional foods, such as bison and blue cornmeal, may also be provided.²⁹

Who can apply: Those meeting monthly income limits set by the federal government and living in a state that offers the program are eligible.^{30,31}

Website: [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations](#)

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