

APPLYING FOR FOOD STAMP BENEFITS

The Food Stamp Program helps you buy nutritious food for you and your family. This document will tell you more about how the program works and what you need to do in order to apply for benefits.

The county food stamp office wants to get you the help you need. **If you have a disability or need help with applying or continuing to receive food stamp benefits, let a county worker know.**

The law says that everyone who applies for or receives benefits and services must be treated fairly. Every county has a civil rights coordinator. If you feel you have been discriminated against, contact the civil rights coordinator in your county or call 1-866-741-6241. Look in your application for more information about filing a complaint.

HOW DO I APPLY?

You can apply for food stamp benefits by completing a food stamp application and returning it to a food stamp office in the county where you live. When you apply for food stamp benefits, you are applying for everyone in the household who buys and prepares food together, but you do not have to apply for people who are ineligible because of their immigrant status.

- ◇ If you need food stamp benefits right away because you don't have much money, you may get food stamp benefits within three (3) days of turning in your application. This is called "Expedited Service." Not everyone can get Expedited Service, but it's a good idea to ask.
- ◇ After turning in an application, most people will be scheduled for an interview at the food stamp office. If you can't come to the office for your interview, you may be able to have your interview by phone, a worker may be able to come to your home, or other arrangements can be made. You may also authorize someone to go to the office and apply for you.
- ◇ During this interview, a county worker will go over the application and ask you more questions to complete the application process. You will need to gather the documents listed on this page and bring them to your interview.
- ◇ If you applied for both CalWORKs and food stamp benefits, but were denied CalWORKs, your original food stamp application will still be processed.

CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO BRING TO YOUR INTERVIEW

During your interview, the food stamp worker will need to see certain documents. If you have questions about what to bring, call the food stamp office. If you don't have all of your documents, be sure to go to your interview anyway--your worker may help you get the documents. They will also tell you if there is another way to show proof of the information you give.

Personal Identification

You will need to prove who you are. You can bring a birth certificate, driver's license, school or work I.D., voter registration, Social Security card, a sworn statement from someone who knows you, or an identification form from General Assistance or General Relief. If you have no address, be prepared to tell the worker where you are staying. If you are an immigrant, bring immigration papers for everyone who is applying for food stamp benefits.

Social Security Number

You will need to provide social security numbers for all members of your household who have them. You don't have to bring in the cards, just the numbers. If someone doesn't have a social security number, you need to bring proof (such as a letter from the Social Security office) that you have applied. You do not have to provide social security numbers for people who are not applying because of their immigrant status.

Proof of Your Income

If you have income, you will need to prove how much income you have and where it comes from. For money you earn at a job, you can bring one of the following: your pay stubs, a letter from your employer on company letterhead, your W-2 form, wage tax receipt, state or federal tax return, or self-employment bookkeeping records. For money from benefit programs (like social security, unemployment or workers compensation, or student aid), bring a copy of your benefit check or an official letter describing what you receive.

Proof of Your Assets

If you have bank account, bring a bankbook or current bank statement.

Proof of Your Expenses

Bring rent or mortgage receipts, utility bills, receipts for child or adult care, and receipts for medical expenses for people over 60 or disabled. If you pay court-ordered child support, bring proof of that payment. Proving these expenses may help you get more food stamp benefits.

WHAT YOU'LL BE ASKED AND WHY

During your interview at the county food stamp office, you will be asked a number of questions to determine whether you can get food stamp benefits and the amount of benefits you can get. Your worker is required by state or federal law to ask these questions.

Questions about Immigration Status

You will be asked if members of your household are citizens. If they are not, your worker will ask when they arrived in the United States and for proof of their documentation. **If you are a lawful permanent resident (LPR), you are eligible for food stamp benefits, as long as you meet other eligibility rules.**

WHAT YOU'LL BE ASKED AND WHY

Please keep in mind that the Food Stamp Program needs this information to determine whether the people in your household are eligible for food stamp benefits. If you are not a citizen or do not have documentation, you can receive food stamp benefits for your children if they are citizens or LPRs.

Questions about Felonies

Your food stamp worker is required to ask you two questions about felonies. First, you will also be asked if anyone in your household is fleeing the law to avoid felony prosecution, custody/confinement after conviction or violation of parole probation. Under federal law, fleeing felons are not eligible for benefits. Second, you will be asked if anyone in your household has been convicted of a drug felony that occurred after August 22, 1996. People convicted (after August 22, 1996) of a drug felony for manufacturing, sales or distribution of a controlled substance, or any activity in connection with these unlawful acts, or harvesting, cultivating or processing marijuana, or involving a minor in these activities cannot get food stamp benefits. Other members of the household may still be able to receive food stamp benefits.

Question about Fraud

Your food stamp worker is also required to ask if anyone in your household has ever committed welfare fraud. If someone has committed welfare fraud, it doesn't necessarily mean that you won't get food stamp benefits.

Questions about Income

Your ability to get food stamp benefits depends partly on how much money and resources you have. Your county worker will ask you questions about your income to make sure you get the right amount of benefits.

SOME IMPORTANT FOOD STAMP RULES

The Food Stamp Program has a lot of rules, but most of them depend on your specific situation. Here are some of the important ones:

Immigration Status

To get food stamp benefits in California, you must be a U.S. Citizen, a U.S. National, or be someone who is a lawful permanent resident (LPR) of the U.S. If you are an undocumented immigrant, you cannot get food stamp benefits but your children may be able to get benefits if they are citizens or LPRs. Getting food stamp benefits will not affect your immigration status or the status of your family. Immigration information is private and confidential.

Assets and Property

There is a \$2,000 limit on the amount of money that people in your household can have at home, in the bank, or in other places. If someone in your household is at least 60 years old, or disabled, your household can have a \$3,000 limit. The value of your house does not count as long as you live in it.

Utility Allowances

You will be allowed a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) deduction if you have heating and cooling costs. If you have utility costs other than heating or cooling, such as water, sewer and garbage, you will be given a Limited Utility Allowance (LUA) deduction. If you only have a telephone cost, you will be given a Telephone Utility Allowance (TUA) deduction. The SUA, LUA and TUA are used to reduce your income, which helps you get more benefits.

Living in the County

All of the food stamp rules are the same from county to county, but you must be living in the county where you apply for benefits. If you move to a different county, you will need to reapply at the office in the new county.

Food Stamp Work Rules

If you are 16 through 59 years old, there are some work rules you may need to meet. You can be excused from the work rules for reasons such as mental or physical health problems that keep you from working, getting unemployment benefits, taking care of a child under age 6, or for other reasons that your worker can explain to you. If you are not excused, then some of the work rules you will need to meet may include keeping appointments, taking a job the county sends you to, not turning down or quitting a job, not reducing the hours you work, looking for work, doing community service, or going to school or training. If you don't meet the work rules, your food stamp benefits can be denied or stopped for one, three or six months.

Food Stamp Work Rule for Adults Without Children

If you are over 17 and under 50 and you are not caring for a minor child, you may also have to meet another work rule. You can be excused from this work rule if you are pregnant, live in the same food stamp household with a minor child, have mental or physical health problems that keep you from working, or for other reasons that your county worker can explain to you. If you are not excused, you must meet the work rule by doing one or more of the following for a total of 20 hours per week: work, school, or training. Or, you must do community service for the number of hours the county tells you.

If you don't meet the work rule for three months during a three-year period, and you don't have a good reason, your food stamp benefits will stop unless you are excused. You can get food stamp benefits again by meeting the work rule for the number of hours that the county tells you. After that, you might be able to get another three months of food stamp benefits without having to meet the work rule.

SOME IMPORTANT FOOD STAMP RULES (Continued)

If you are self-employed

If you are self-employed, you can either deduct your actual business expenses or use a standard deduction of 40 percent of your gross income. Once you choose a method of figuring your self-employed net income, you can only change this method when you are re-certified for food stamp benefits or every six months, whichever happens sooner.

Reporting

Most households must send a report on their income to the county each quarter in order to continue getting food stamp benefits. Other households must send in a report only when they have a change in income or household situation. Your worker will explain how to report.

College, Business or Vocational Students

You can get food stamp benefits if you are a student and you are working, enrolled in an employment and training program, disabled, getting cash assistance, over the age of 50, or the parent of young children.

Amount of food stamp benefits

There is a limit to the number of food stamp benefits you can get each month. This amount is based on the number of people in your household and how much money you have each month after you pay for things like rent, utilities and child care.

If your household gets too many food stamp benefits by mistake, you may have to pay them back--even if it wasn't your fault that it happened.

A note about rules: If you do not understand a rule, please ask your worker to explain it. It's important to understand the rules so you can get as many food stamp benefits as your household is allowed to get.

USING YOUR FOOD STAMP BENEFITS

How do I get my food stamp benefits?

Your county has Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system, you will receive a plastic EBT card containing your benefits. Your county will mail or issue you a plastic card that you will use to purchase your food. Your worker will tell you how you will get your EBT card in your county.

If your EBT card is lost, stolen or destroyed, call your worker right away. You may be able to get it replaced.

How do I use my food stamp benefits?

You **can** use your food stamp benefits to buy almost all foods, as well as seeds and plants to grow your own food. You do not have to pay sales tax on any item you buy with food stamp benefits. Food stamp benefits are accepted at most large grocery stores, as well as some farmers markets, convenience stores and other places that sell groceries.

You **cannot** use food stamp benefits to buy alcohol, tobacco, pet food, some types of already cooked food, or anything that is not food (like toothpaste, soap, or paper towels).

Once you receive your food stamp benefits, sign the EBT card. This will make it easier to trace if it is lost or stolen. Keep your EBT card in a safe place until you are ready to purchase food.

What happens if I no longer receive CalWORKs?

If you stop getting CalWORKs, you may still be able to get food stamp benefits. You may be eligible for transitional food stamp benefits. Food stamp benefits can help your family as you make the transition from welfare to work, so be sure to check with your worker about whether you can continue.