



Division of Family and Children Services

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-SNAP (Food Stamps)

**IN
GEORGIA**

THE FOOD STAMP (SNAP) PROGRAM IN GEORGIA

If you need help reading or completing this document or need help communicating with us, ask us or call 1-877-423-4746. Our services, including interpreters, are free. If you are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or have difficulty speaking, you can call us at the number above by dialing 711 (Georgia Relay).

WHAT IS THE FOOD STAMP (SNAP) PROGRAM?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as the Food Stamp Program, is a federally funded program that provides monthly benefits to low-income households to help pay for the cost of food. SNAP provides employment and training opportunities to recipients who want to participate in the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program. The program also provides nutrition education to low-income households to promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. SNAP outreach activities are provided through community partner agencies and the local community food banks.

WHAT IS A HOUSEHOLD?

A household may be one person living alone, a family, or several, unrelated individuals who live together and routinely purchase and prepare meals together. Certain family members or individuals who live together and do not routinely purchase and prepare meals together do not have to be included in the household. For those individuals, social security numbers, immigration status and citizenship do not have to be provided to the caseworker. The decision of whether an individual must be included in the household is based on federal regulations.

WHO CAN APPLY FOR FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

Anyone may apply for SNAP benefits. The program helps households that have limited income and resources. This includes households experiencing temporary crisis as well as households whose income is at or below the poverty level.

WHAT IS AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE?

An authorized representative is a person your household allows to apply for, to obtain and/or to use SNAP benefits on behalf of your household because you are unable to do so.

WHERE DO YOU APPLY?

Each county has a Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) office.

This department takes applications for food stamp (SNAP) benefits.

Look under the county government section online or go to the website of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) at www.dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/locations to find the address and telephone number of your local county office.

WHEN CAN YOU APPLY?

All Department of Family and Children Services offices are open Monday through Friday, except weekends and holidays. Office hours are usually from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Call your local county department for the office hours in your area. Online applications are available via the Georgia Gateway website at: www.gateway.ga.gov.

HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR BENEFITS?

To apply for benefits, the head of household, a household member, or authorized person representing the household may complete an application for assistance. An application can be received from your local County Department of Family and Children Services or from the DFCS website. You can go to the Gateway website or the local DFCS office to apply, call the office to request that an application be mailed to your home address, or have someone get a form for you. You may copy the blank application found on the website at: www.dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/foodstamps. Complete the form, mail or fax or take it to your local county office.

HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR BENEFITS ONLINE?

You may also apply for Food Stamps (SNAP) online via the Gateway website at <https://gateway.ga.gov/access/>. Gateway allows individuals to apply for Food Stamps online. Applicants who create an account online may check the status of their application and may also check their eligibility for other DHS programs via the Gateway Pre-screening Tool. Additionally, Gateway allows food stamp recipients to report changes in household circumstances and to renew their benefits online.

WHEN IS AN APPLICATION CONSIDERED FILED?

An application is considered filed when the application has the name of the head of household, address, date, and signature of the head of household or another household member and is received by the local county office. The application may be filed in person at the local Department of Family and Children Services, by mail or fax or online. An application *should* be filed at your local county Department of Family and Children Services, but any Department of Family and Children Services can accept your application. You should try to complete the entire application. It is **very** important that you give your telephone number and/or address so that DFCS is able to reach you by phone.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THE APPLICATION IS FILED?

You or a household member (or someone authorized to make application for your household) must be interviewed by a caseworker from DFCS. The individual who is interviewed must know about your household situation. A phone interview is required.

For elderly/disabled individuals or individuals experiencing problems coming to the office, the interview may be completed by telephone, a pre-arranged home visit, or an office visit. Contact your local county office to find out about interviews.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE INTERVIEW?

The caseworker will ask you questions about your household's income, resources, rent or mortgage, and utility expenses. Certain households may also be asked about medical expenses, childcare and child support expenses. Proof of your household situation is necessary, so if you have the following information, you may bring it with you:

- ❖ proof of your identity
- ❖ proof of your citizenship such as birth certificate, U.S. passport, hospital record, etc.
- ❖ immigration papers for persons applying for benefits, who are not U.S. citizens
- ❖ social security numbers for persons applying for benefits
- ❖ proof of income for each household member (check stubs, award letters for social security or veteran's administration, unemployment benefits, contributions from family or friends, child support, etc.)
- ❖ last month's rent receipt or mortgage payment book
- ❖ medical bills for persons age 60 and older and/or disabled
- ❖ childcare receipts for children whose parents are working, in school, or in training
- ❖ additional information and proof may be required depending upon your situation.

If you do not have all the information when you first apply, you are given 10 days from the date of the interview to provide the required proof.

The interview is an official and confidential discussion of the household's circumstances. The interviewer must not simply gather and review information but must explore and resolve unclear or incomplete information.

If an individual in your household does not want to give us a social security number or information about immigration status or citizenship, the individual will not be eligible for food stamp benefits. Other household members may still be eligible for benefits.

An individual is not reported to the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, for choosing not to give a social security number or immigration status.

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS IF:

- you are a citizen of the United States or have a certain legal alien status
- you provide all of the required documents as proof of the household's situation
- you and/or other household members comply with work requirements
- the household's monthly income does not exceed the income limits based on the number of people who live in the household
- the rent or mortgage payment, utility bills, and in some cases medical, childcare and child support expenses are considered in the eligibility determination process if proof of these expenses are provided.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

The application must be processed and benefits available within 30 days from the date the application is filed. If your household has little or no income and meets specific criteria, the application must be processed and benefits available within 7 days. A notice is sent to each household stating whether the household is eligible for SNAP benefits. If eligible, the notice states the amount of benefits the household will receive and how long the household will receive benefits before having to reapply.

HOW MUCH WILL YOU RECEIVE?

The amount of benefits your household receives depends upon the number of individuals in your food stamp household, the amount of household income and the amount of deductions used in the budgeting process. The date of application affects the amount of benefits received by the household in the first month. As long as your household remains eligible, benefits are provided each month. Benefits remaining in your EBT account can be obtained until they are used up even if your food stamp case closes.

HOW LONG DO YOU GET FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

If eligible, your household can receive SNAP for one month to one year before reapplying. In the last month of the certification period, your household should receive an appointment letter from DFCS. The letter tells you that your certification period is about to end and that your household must reapply.

If your response to this letter is timely, your benefits will continue if your household is still eligible. If you do not respond to the letter, your benefits will stop.

HOW ARE FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS ISSUED TO YOU?

Benefits are issued using an electric benefit transfer (EBT) card and Personal Identification Number (PIN).

If you are eligible for benefits and have never received as the head of a household, an EBT card will be mailed to you. The household uses the EBT card in authorized stores to purchase food. When the total amount of the food benefit purchase is determined at the checkout counter, you swipe your EBT card through a point of sale device and enter your PIN number. The amount of the purchase is deducted from your total monthly allotment.

WHEN ARE BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO THE HOUSEHOLD?

Benefits are credited to the EBT account from the 5th through the 23rd of each month. To access your benefits, you need your EBT card and PIN. If your EBT card is lost or stolen or you forget your PIN, call the EBT customer service help line at 1-888-421-3281. Your lost or stolen card will be cancelled. A new EBT card and/or PIN will be issued to your household. To obtain information on-line about your EBT account, log on to www.ebt.acs-inc.com.

Using your card number and Personal Identification Number (PIN), you can:

- Check your current account balance
- Review your transaction history
- Change your PIN
- Contact Customer Service

You must have your card number ready to access your information. Remember to keep your EBT card and PIN in a safe place. If someone gets your EBT card and PIN, that individual is able to obtain your benefits. Benefits taken from your EBT account are **not** replaced by DFCS.

WHERE CAN YOU SPEND FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

Food stores which are authorized by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) may accept EBT transactions to purchase food. Most stores provide signs to indicate that food stamp benefits may be used to purchase food products.

WHAT IS PURCHASED WITH FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

Benefits may only be used to buy food and plants or seeds that grow food, for your household to eat. Certain food supplements such as Ensure may be purchased with food stamp benefits. Ice, water and cold or room temperature foods, which are not designed to

be consumed in the store, may be purchased with food stamp benefits.

WHAT IS NOT PURCHASED WITH FOOD STAMP (SNAP) BENEFITS?

Food stamp (SNAP) benefits cannot be used to buy alcoholic beverages, cigarettes or tobacco, household supplies such as soap and paper products, medicines, vitamins, pet foods, or any non-food items.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS?

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- receive an application on the day you ask for it.
- request assistance filling out this form and free language assistance services (interpreters, translated materials, or direct in-language services) if you have trouble reading, writing, speaking, or understanding the English language.
- request auxiliary aids and services and reasonable modifications if you or someone in your household has a disability.
- have your application accepted when you file it.
- have an adult apply for your household if you cannot get to the food stamp office.
- have a home visit or telephone interview if you are 60 or older or are disabled and cannot find someone to apply for you.
- have your EBT card and PIN within 30 days of the date you file your application, if eligible, or
- have your EBT card and PIN within 5 days of the date you file your application, if eligible for expedited services.
- receive fair treatment without regard to age, sex, race, color, handicap, religious creed, national origin, or political beliefs.
- have a fair hearing if you disagree with any action taken on your case.
- examine your case file and the rules of the program.
- be notified in advance if your benefits are reduced or stopped due to a change that is not reported in writing.

WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

- You must answer all questions completely.
- You must sign your name to certify, under penalty of perjury, that all answers are true.
- You must provide proof that you are eligible for benefits.
- Do not sell, trade, or give away your food stamp benefits.
- Use food stamp benefits to buy only eligible items.

WHEN RECEIVING BENEFITS WHAT CHANGES MUST YOUR HOUSEHOLD REPORT?

Simplified Reporting Households – All food stamp (SNAP) households in Georgia have simplified reporting requirements.

- This means you must report when your household's total monthly gross income is more than 130% of the federal poverty level for your household size.
- If you are a working adult between the ages of 18-52 with no children, you must report when your work hours are less than 20 hours a week, averaged 80 hours per month, within 10 days from the end of the month in which the change occurred.
- You must report when your household receives **substantial lottery and gambling winnings**. This is a cash prize won in a single game. If you or a household member receives lottery or gambling winnings, gross amount of \$4250 or more (before taxes or other amounts are withheld), you must report these winnings within 10 days from the end of the month in which the household received the winnings.

Your caseworker will explain this requirement to you. You may report changes to the DFCS Call Center at 1-877-423-4746 or at <https://gateway.ga.gov/access/>.

WHAT ARE THE PENALTIES FOR BREAKING THE RULES?

You may lose your benefits or be subject to criminal prosecution for knowingly providing false information.

- Do not give false information or hide information to get benefits your household should not get.
- Do not use Food Stamps (SNAP) or EBT cards that are not yours and do not let someone else use your card.
- Do not use Food Stamps (SNAP) to buy nonfood items such as alcohol or cigarettes or to pay on credit cards.
- Do not trade or sell Food Stamps (SNAP) or EBT cards for illegal items such as firearms, ammunition, or controlled substance (illegal drugs).

Any household member who breaks any of the food stamp rules on purpose can be barred from the Food Stamp Program for one year to permanently, fined up to \$250,000, imprisoned up to 20 years or both. She/he may also be subject to prosecution under other applicable Federal and State laws. She/he may also be barred from the Food Stamp Program for an additional 18 months if court ordered.

Any household member who intentionally breaks the rules may not get Food Stamps for one year for the first offense, two years for the second offense, and permanently for the third offense.

If a court of law finds you or any household member guilty of using or receiving food stamp benefits in a transaction involving the sale of a controlled substance, you or that household member will not be eligible for benefits for two years for the first offense, and permanently for the second offense.

If a court of law finds you or any household member guilty of having used or received benefits in a transaction involving the sale of firearms, ammunition or explosives, you or that household member will be permanently ineligible to participate in the Food Stamp Program upon the first offense of this violation.

If a court of law finds you or any household member guilty of having trafficked benefits for an aggregate amount of \$500 or more, you or that household member will be permanently ineligible to participate in the Food Stamp Program upon the first offense of this violation.

If you or any household member is found to have given a fraudulent statement or representation with respect to identity (who they are) or place of residence (where they live) in order to receive multiple Food Stamp benefits, you or that household member will be ineligible to participate in the Food Stamp Program for a period of 10 years.

Notice of ADA/Section 504 Rights

Help for People with Disabilities

The Georgia Department of Human Services (“the Department”) is required by federal law* to provide persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in and qualify for the Department’s programs, services, or activities. This includes programs such as SNAP, TANF and Medical Assistance.

The Department provides reasonable modifications when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination based on disability. For example, we may change policies, practices, or procedures to provide equal access. To ensure equally effective communication, we provide persons with disabilities or their companions with disabilities, communication assistance, such as sign language interpreters. Our help is free. The Department is not required to make any modification that would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a service, program, or activity or in undue financial and administrative burdens.

How to Request a Reasonable Modification or Communication Assistance

Please contact your caseworker if you have a disability and need a reasonable modification, communication assistance, or extra help. For instance, call if you need an aid or service for effective communication, like a sign language interpreter. You may contact your caseworker or call DFCS at (877) 423-4746 to make your request. You may also make your request using the DFCS ADA Reasonable Modification Request Form, which is available at your local DFCS office or online at <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/adasection-504-and-civil-rights>, but you do not have to use a form to make a request.

How to File a Complaint

You have the right to make a complaint if the Department has discriminated against you because of your disability. For example, you may file a discrimination complaint if you have asked for a reasonable modification or sign language interpreter that has been denied or not acted on within a reasonable time. You can make a complaint orally or in writing by contacting your case worker, your local DFCS office, or the DFCS Civil Rights and ADA/Section 504 Coordinator at 47 Trinity Avenue, SW, Atlanta, GA 30334, (877) 423-4746.

You can ask your case worker for a copy of the DFCS civil rights complaint form. The complaint form is also available at <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/adasection-504-and-civil-rights>. If you need help making a discrimination complaint, you may contact any DFCS staff listed above. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or who may have speech disabilities may call 711 for an operator to connect with us.

You may also file a discrimination complaint with the appropriate federal agency. Contact information for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is within the “Nondiscrimination Statement”.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 ensure persons with disabilities are free from unlawful discrimination.*

Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), religious creed, disability, age, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the agency (state or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (833) 620-1071, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to:

1. **mail:**
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA
1320 Braddock Place, Room 334
Alexandria, VA 22314; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
FNSCIVILRIGHTSCOMPLAINTS@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Under the **Department of Human Service (DHS)**, you may also file other discrimination complaints by contacting your local DFCS office, or the DFCS Civil Rights, ADA/Section 504 Coordinator at Georgia Department of Human Services, Office of General Counsel, 47 Trinity Avenue SW, Atlanta, GA 30334, (877) 423-4746. For complaints alleging discrimination based on limited English proficiency, contact the DHS Limited English Proficiency and Sensory Impaired Program at: Georgia Department of Human Services, Office of General Counsel, 47 Trinity Avenue SW, Atlanta, GA 30334, (877) 423-4746.