



WASHINGTON BASIC FOOD PROGRAM

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WHAT IS BASIC FOOD?

Basic Food is a food and nutrition program for individuals and families who meet income guidelines. Also known as the Food Stamp Program, Basic Food helps people to afford a nutritious diet by providing eligible households an electronic benefits card and monthly benefits to buy food at participating grocery stores.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Basic Food is available to more people in Washington than ever before. The gross income limits increased to 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and now net income limits and asset limits are waved under the recent expansion. Many people who previously had too much income for the program are now eligible because of higher income limits.

IS BASIC FOOD ONLY FOR U.S. CITIZENS?

No. While the **federal** Food Stamp Program is limited to U.S. citizens and immigrants that meet specific program rules, the **state** pays for Basic Food benefits to legal immigrants who do not meet the citizen rules for the federal program. Non-citizens who receive Basic Food are not considered a “public charge” and getting Basic Food benefits will not impact someone’s immigration status with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

Undocumented immigrants and non-citizens who are tourists or other non-immigrants cannot receive Basic Food.

HOW MUCH INCOME CAN MY HOUSEHOLD HAVE AND BE ELIGIBLE FOR BASIC FOOD?

You may be eligible for Basic Food if your household income (before taxes or other deductions) is not more than the amounts listed in the table below, based on the number of people in your household.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER ADVANTAGES TO THE BASIC FOOD PROGRAM?

Yes. Besides monthly benefits to buy food, receiving Basic Food:

- Automatically enrolls school-aged children in the free school meal program;
- Qualifies you for low-cost local phone service through the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP); and
- Shows that your family meets the Women Infants and Children (WIC) income test.

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	MONTHLY GROSS INCOME
1	\$1,805
2	\$2,429
3	\$3,052
4	\$3,675
5	\$4,299
6	\$4,922
7	\$5,545
8	\$6,169
9	\$6,792
10	\$7,415
Add for each person over 10	\$624

HOW DO I APPLY FOR BASIC FOOD?

- Submit an application at a local DSHS Community Services Office (CSO), by mail or online at www.foodhelp.wa.gov
- Participate in an interview. We can arrange a phone interview if an in-person interview is not convenient.
- Provide your social security number, proof of your identity, and proof of the income and living expenses for your household. We can help you get this proof if needed.

BASIC FOOD BENEFIT AMOUNTS

HOW ARE MONTHLY FOOD BENEFITS CALCULATED?

Basic Food benefits are an additional support to supplement the income that your household spends each month on food. Your benefits are determined using limits set by the federal government.

- First, we subtract allowable deductions from your income. These deductions include living expenses like rent, mortgage, utilities, childcare and child support.
- Next, we calculate your household benefit by subtracting 30% of the remaining income from the maximum monthly benefit for your household size. Households with little to no income usually receive the maximum benefit. Most households receive an amount somewhere in the middle.

DO ASSETS LIKE A HOME, CAR, OR MONEY IN THE BANK IMPACT ELIGIBILITY FOR BASIC FOOD?

No. There is no asset test for Basic Food. You can own a home, have a reliable car, have money in checking or savings accounts, or a retirement plan and still be eligible for Basic Food.

WHAT IS THE MONTHLY BENEFIT AMOUNT FOR BASIC FOOD?

Monthly benefit amounts vary based on the number of people living in your household, your income, and living expenses that you pay for. The **average** monthly benefit families received in February 2009 was about \$216. The **highest** monthly benefits are:

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Max. Monthly Benefit</u>	<u>Household Size</u>	<u>Max. Monthly Benefit</u>
1	\$200	5	\$793
2	\$367	6	\$952
3	\$526	7	\$1052
4	\$668	8	\$1202
		Each Additional Person	\$150

The **lowest** monthly benefit for a household of one or two persons is \$16. Households with higher income or lower living expenses receive a lower monthly benefit. The calculation required by the federal government may cause some people to be eligible for the minimum \$16, and sometimes even zero dollars per month.

If your household has three or more persons, there is no minimum benefit. You *may* be approved for a monthly benefit of zero, but would still receive the related benefits described earlier, such as free school meals.

IS IT WORTH IT TO KEEP MY BASIC FOOD IF I'LL RECEIVE ZERO OR \$16?

Only you can decide if Basic Food is helpful for your family. When deciding, please consider that while enrolled in Basic Food:

- If your income decreases or your expenses increase, you can call to report this and we will determine if this change in circumstance would increase your benefits. You will not have to reapply or have another interview.
- School-aged children in your household are **automatically enrolled** in the free school meals program—no additional work is required to sign up. Many families receiving Basic Food get the free meals and would not qualify if they applied directly through the school.
- You are eligible for low-cost local phone service through the Washington Telephone Assistance Program (WTAP). Call 1-888-700-8800 for more information. To sign up, you must call your phone service provider and give your client ID number, social security number and date of birth.
- Your family meets the Women Infants and Children (WIC) income test. If you have an infant or toddler in your household, you can use your Basic Food award letter as verification. To find the WIC office nearest you, call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

HOW AND WHEN BASIC FOOD BENEFITS ARE DELIVERED

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO RECEIVE MY BENEFITS?

On average, we approve applications for eligible households in 11 days, however nearly half of all applications are approved in less than six days. When we approve an application for Basic Food, benefits go back to the date of application.

HOW WILL I GET MY BENEFITS?

When your application is approved, you are given an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. It looks like a debit or credit card. Each month, we issue benefits onto your account by the tenth day of each month. The dates vary from the 1st to the 10th depending on the last number of your Basic Food case. If the last number of your case is one (1), you will get your benefits on the first day of the month; if it is two (2), you'll get your benefits on the second day of the month, and so on.

DO MY BENEFITS EXPIRE IF I DON'T USE THEM IN THE MONTH THEY ARE ISSUED?

Any benefits remaining in your EBT account at the end of the month are carried over into the next month. However, if you have not used your benefits **at all** for one year, we must begin the process of permanently removing your Basic Food benefits from your EBT account.

USING BASIC FOOD BENEFITS

WHERE CAN I USE BASIC FOOD BENEFITS?

You can use your benefits at any grocery store, convenience store or discount retailer that accepts Basic Food or Food Stamp benefits. Most stores, including major chains, accept Basic Food. Many farmers markets also accept Basic Food benefits through the EBT card—just look for the EBT logo on the door or cash register.

CAN I USE MY EBT CARD IN ANOTHER STATE?

Yes. A Washington EBT Quest Card can be used in all states. However, if you move out of the state, you must notify us about the move and be sure to apply for benefits in the new state where you will live.

CAN I HAVE SOMEONE USE MY CARD TO BUY FOOD FOR ME?

If you want someone else to have access to benefits for your household, you can set them up as an alternate card holder. An additional EBT card for your account would be issued to this person so they would be able to purchase food for you.

WHAT CAN I BUY WITH BASIC FOOD BENEFITS?

Basic Food benefits **can** be used to buy people in your household food items such as:

- Breads and cereals
- Fruits and vegetables
- Cheese, milk and other dairy products
- Meats, fish, poultry and eggs
- Most other food items that are not prepared hot foods
- Seeds and plants that produce food for your household

Basic Food **cannot** be used to buy:

- Pet Foods
- Soaps, paper products
- Household supplies
- Vitamins or medicines
- Food that will be eaten in the store
- Hot foods
- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco

HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BASIC FOOD?

- Call us toll-free at 1-877-514-FOOD (3663)
- Visit us online at www.foodhelp.wa.gov. If you don't have access to a computer or the Internet, you can use the computer at many public libraries.



CSD Community Services
Division