

HOW TO APPLY  
FOR AND USE

# BASIC FOOD BENEFITS



Washington State  
Department of Social  
& Health Services

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*Transforming lives*

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DSHS 22-297(X) (Rev. 10/24)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
<b>Applying for Basic Food</b>	
Can I get Basic Food? .....	2
How do I apply for Basic Food? .....	2
What happens after I turn in my application? .....	3
What do I need for the interview? ....	4
What happens if something changes in my household circumstances? .....	5
If I am eligible, when will I receive my food benefits? .....	6
How long will I receive Basic Food? .....	7
Does the department have a non-discrimination policy? .....	8
<b>Using Basic Food Benefits</b>	
What is the Washington QUEST EBT card? .....	9
What is an EBT PIN? .....	9
What is an alternate card holder? .....	10
When should I call EBT customer service? .....	10
What can and can't I do with my EBT card and benefits? .....	11
<b>FREQUENTLY ASKED EBT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS .....</b>	<b>13</b>

Basic Food (federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) helps people buy groceries.

The amount of Basic Food you can receive is based on your family size, countable income and monthly expenses such as housing, utilities, child support and medical costs.

For an estimate of the monthly Basic Food amount you could receive, call 877-501-2233.

**When you get Basic Food you may qualify for other programs, too:**

- Free or reduced-price school meal program
- Special nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children or WIC

If you would like more information or have specific questions about your situation, call 877-501-2233 or visit our website at [washingtonconnection.org/home/](http://washingtonconnection.org/home/)



## Can I get Basic Food?

### You may, if you:

- Live in Washington state
- Have income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level
- Meet citizenship or immigration status requirements. If you receive Basic Food, you won't be considered for public charge.

## Who can't get Basic Food?

- A fugitive felon
- An undocumented immigrant

There may be other requirements based on your family's situation.

## How do I apply for Basic Food?

There are four ways to apply for Basic Food:

- Online at [washingtonconnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org).
- By phone, without submitting an application, by calling 877-501-2233
- In person at the local DSHS Community Service Office. Find a CSO nearest you at [dshs.wa.gov/office-locations](https://dshs.wa.gov/office-locations).
- By mail:  
DSHS Customer Service Center  
P.O. Box 11699  
Tacoma, WA 98411-6699

For more information, call 877-501-2233.

Turn in your application as soon as you can. If you qualify, your benefits start from the date your application is received. You can submit applications online 24/7 at [washingtonconnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org) and follow up to complete your eligibility interview by phone at 877-501-2233. If you call 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Monday-Friday, there's no need to complete an application ahead of time.

## What happens after I turn in my application?

If you apply online or mail it in, you will have an interview to ensure we understand the information on the application. Interviews take place over the phone or at your local DSHS Community Services Office. If you apply at your local Community Services Office or by phone at 877-501-2233, filling out an application ahead of time isn't required.

### During the interview, we will:

- Explain program rules
- Ask you questions about the information on your application
- Ask you for proof of certain information.
- Give you a copy of your rights and responsibilities
- Explain the purpose, appropriate use, and penalties of misuse of the Basic Foo program.
- Explain anything you don't understand

If you need help with the interview process, someone who knows your circumstances can apply and be interviewed on your behalf. This person is called an authorized representative.



## What do I need for the interview?

**You must provide proof of:**

- Your identity
- Family income
- Immigration status of any non-citizen household members, including sponsor's income and resource information if applicable.

**We may also ask you to provide proof of any unclear information.**

After the interview, we will give you a letter listing any proof we still need. We will help you get proof of the things we need during your interview. You will have at least 10 days to provide the proof.



# What happens if something changes in my household circumstances?

If your household only receives Basic Food, you need to tell us if your total gross household income goes above 130% of the federal poverty guidelines. You can tell us of the change in writing, by telephone, in person or online at [washingtonconnection.org](http://washingtonconnection.org).

For writing, the address is:  
DSHS-CSD Customer Service Center  
P.O. Box 11699  
Tacoma WA 98411-6699

By telephone: 877-501-2233

You must report the change by the 10th of the month following the month your income increased. For example, if you have a change that occurred today, you must report by the 10th of next month.

People in Household	Report if Income is Over
1	\$1,632
2	\$2,215
3	\$2,798
4	\$3,380
5	\$3,963





If your household receives other benefits in addition to Basic Food, you must report according to Washington Administrative Code 388-418-0005.

You will be told in writing how the change affects your food benefits. If you don't agree, you may talk to an eligibility worker, a supervisor or an administrator. If you still don't agree, you may ask for an administrative hearing.

## **If I am eligible, when will I receive my food benefits?**

When you first apply, your benefits are issued after we receive all the information we need to decide you are eligible.

The specific day your food benefits are available is printed on your approval notice. After your initial Basic Food amount is issued to you, the day of the month you receive your Basic Food won't change.

Your benefits are available on weekends and holidays, and any benefits you haven't spent by the end of the month are carried over to the next month.





# How long will I receive Basic Food?

When you are eligible for the Basic Food program you will receive a letter from us that tells you:

- If you are eligible
- The total months in your certification period
- The amount of food benefits you will receive

Half way through your certification period (six months for most households), you will receive a Mid-Certification Review to complete. We use the report to update information about you, the people in your home, your household income and certain expenses. This is to make sure you are receiving the correct benefit amount. You can also complete the review over the phone.

About 45 days before your Basic Food is set to expire, you will receive a notice with an Eligibility Review form to fill out if you still want food benefits.

## Complete and return the Eligibility Review form to:

DSHS Customer Service Center  
P.O. Box 11699  
Tacoma, WA 98411-6699

We will send you a letter to arrange an interview over the phone or in your local DSHS Community Services Office. You must complete this interview to find out if you are eligible to receive more food benefits.



## Does the department have a non-discrimination policy?

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, audiotope, 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:

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

# What is the Washington Quest EBT card?

The Electronic Benefits Transfer system is a safe, convenient and easy way for you to get your food benefits each month.

- You must use the EBT card to get your benefits.
- The EBT card works similarly to an ATM card, but the food benefits on it can only be used to buy food.
- Your benefits will be put in an account set up for you.
- Your benefits can only be used with your secret personal identification number.



## What is an EBT PIN?

Every time you use your card, you must enter four secret numbers. These numbers are called a PIN or personal identification number.

\*\*\*\* = PIN (4 secret numbers)

### These are the ways to get a PIN:

- If you get your card at your local DSHS office, you will choose your PIN at that time.
- If the card is sent to you through the mail, you must call Customer Service to choose your new or replacement PIN.

You need these four numbers and your card to get your benefits.

Don't write your PIN on your card, and don't share your PIN with anyone not in your household! Keep your PIN in a safe place and not in the same purse or wallet as your card.

If you lose your card or it is damaged, the PIN is still good. A replacement card will have the same PIN. The PIN won't change unless you ask that it be changed.

## What is an alternate card holder?

You may choose someone else to help you use your benefits. This person is called an alternate card holder.

### The alternate card holder:

- Is chosen by you
- Will receive their own Washington QUEST card and PIN at a local DSHS office
- Will be able to spend your benefits

If you choose someone to be your alternate card holder, choose a person you trust.

Remember, you are approving access to all of your benefits, so anything they spend can't be replaced. For more information or to get an authorization form, call 877-501-2233.

## EBT customer service contact information

**Call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, toll-free when:**

- You need to know the balance in your food or cash account
- Your card is lost, stolen or damaged
- You want to hear your last 10 transactions for your cash or food benefit account
- You want a replacement card or PIN by mail

## When should I call EBT customer service?

EBT Customer Service  
888-328-9271

TTY State Relay Number  
800-833-8388

Braille TTY State Relay Number  
800-833-6385

**Customer service representatives can also help you:**

- Find a place nearby where you can use your card
- Get a two-month history of your transactions
- Report problems with ATMs
- If you speak a language other than English

## **What can and can't I do with my EBT card and benefits?**

Misuse of your Washington QUEST card is a state and federal crime!

### **Appropriate Use**

You or a member of your household may use your Basic Food benefits to buy such food items as:

- Breads and cereals
- Fruits and vegetables
- Cheese, milk and other dairy products
- Meats, fish, poultry and eggs
- Most other food items that aren't sold as prepared hot foods
- Seeds and plants that produce food

### **Illegal Use**

It isn't legal to:

- Use food benefits on your EBT card for any purpose other than to buy food for eligible household members
- Exchange your food benefits for anything of value (trafficking). Examples of illegal trafficking include exchanging food benefits for cash or anything other than buying food from an authorized retailer.
- Give your benefits to anyone who isn't in your Basic Food household
- Use Basic Food benefits to buy such non-food items as household supplies, vitamins, medicine, pet food, tobacco or alcohol

## **As a Penalty for Illegal Use, You May Be:**

- Disqualified and lose your benefits for at least one year and up to a lifetime. The disqualification continues even if you move to another state.
- Subject to fines
- Subject to legal action, including criminal prosecution. DSHS will cooperate with state, local and federal prosecuting authorities to prosecute for trafficking Basic Food or SNAP benefits.

## **Use your benefits on time**

Your food assistance benefits are intended to meet the current needs of your household.

We may cancel the Basic Food in your account if you don't use any within 274 days.



Q: Can you use your EBT card out of state?

A: The Washington QUEST card is accepted nationwide at retailers participating in the EBT program. Look for the QUEST sign, or check with the store, before trying to use your QUEST card. Stores that sell food may or may not participate as providers of cash benefits.

Q: Can you return a purchase made with your card?

A: Yes. For example, if milk you just bought is spoiled, you can bring the spoiled milk and the receipt back to the store. Your food benefits will be returned to your EBT card. You won't receive cash for the return if the item was purchased using your food benefits.

Q: Can I get cash back from the food benefits on my EBT card?

A: No. Any food benefits you haven't used at the end of the month are available in the next month.

Q: If I move out of state, can I keep receiving Basic Food?

A: Basic Food is the name in Washington for SNAP benefits. You will need to call the customer service center at 877-501-2233 to close your case so you can apply for SNAP benefits in the state where you now live. You can still use the benefits that were issued on your EBT card while you lived in Washington.



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