

## **What do I need to know about Food Stamps?**

The Food Stamp Program is now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP helps low-income people buy healthy food. SNAP benefits go onto an EBT card. You can use an EBT card like a debit card to buy food at certain stores.

## **How do I know if I qualify for food stamps?**

You need to meet certain income guidelines and resource limits to qualify for SNAP. The only way to know if you qualify is to apply for SNAP. To find out more about income and resource limits, go to:  
<http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/SNAP>

## **Where can I get an application for food stamps?**

There are four ways to apply:

1. In person at your local Office of Public Assistance. To find your local Office of Public Assistance, call 1-888-706-1535 or visit <http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/OfficeofPublicAssistance.aspx>. If you cannot go to the Office of Public Assistance, you may have another person, called an authorized representative, apply on your behalf.
2. By mail. You can call 1-888-706-1535 and ask that an application be mailed to you. Or you can download and print an application from the Internet at <http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/hcsd/documents/hcs250.pdf>. You should take or mail the completed application to your

local Office of Public Assistance as soon as possible.

3. Online at [apply.mt.gov](http://apply.mt.gov).
4. Over the phone by calling the Montana Public Assistance Helpline at 1-888-706-1535.

## **What do I do if I feel I have been a victim of discrimination?**

The Office of Public Assistance cannot discriminate against you because of your race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, or political beliefs.

If you believe you have been discriminated against, you can file a complaint by contacting USDA or HHS. To contact the USDA, write to the Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). To contact HHS, write to the Director, Office for Civil Rights, Room 506-F, 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington D.C. 20201 or call (202) 619-0403 (voice) or (202) 619-3257 (TDD).

## **What happens after I turn in my application for food stamps?**

It can take up to thirty days to receive your food stamps. The sooner the application is turned in, the sooner you will receive food stamps.

The Office of Public Assistance will schedule you for an interview. Ask the worker what you need for your interview. Your interview will go better if you are prepared.

## **What if I cannot go to the Office of Public Assistance to have an interview?**

If you cannot go to the Office of Public Assistance to have an interview, you can ask for a telephone interview, a home visit interview, or you can authorize someone to be interviewed on your behalf. If you need special arrangements made for an interview, you must schedule them when you turn in your application.

## **Do I have to work while I am on food stamps?**

Yes. Most able bodied adults between the ages of 16 and 59 must work to get food stamps. In most cases, you will have to work at least 20 hours a week but if you are already working more than 30 hours a week, you cannot voluntarily reduce your hours below 30 hours a week without a good reason.

There are exceptions to the work requirement. You may qualify for an exemption if you are disabled, in school, or if you do not work because you are caring for a household member who is either incapacitated or under the age of six.

## **What happens if my income increases while I am receiving food stamps?**

The amount of food stamps you receive depends on your income. If your income increases while you are receiving food stamps, you should report the change to your caseworker. Your benefits will only be reduced if your income goes over a certain level.

If you do not report an increase in your income that would reduce your food stamps amount and the Office of Public Assistance finds out about it later, you will have to repay the amount you were overpaid. To protect yourself from being charged with an overpayment, you should report any increase in income to the Office of Public Assistance as soon as possible to make sure that you receive the correct amount of food stamps.

### **What is an overpayment?**

An overpayment occurs when you receive more food stamps than you are eligible for based on your income and household size.

If the Office of Public Assistance is at fault for issuing an overpayment, or if you accidentally overlooked needed information, you will still be charged with repaying. In this case, you will be charged 10% of your monthly benefits, or \$10, whichever is greater, until the overpayment is paid back.

If you intentionally lied about or withheld important information, you could be disqualified from receiving food stamps, and you will also be charged with an overpayment.

### **What happens if my application is denied or I lose my food stamps?**

Every person has the right to apply for food stamps. If you are denied this right, you should request a **fair hearing**. If you feel that you were denied food stamps or lost your food stamps for the wrong reason(s), you should request a fair hearing.

You can also refer to Montana Legal Services Association's brochure on "Public Benefits Fair Hearings: How to Protect Your Rights."

### **How do I get more help?**

Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) provides free civil legal help to low-income people. Contact us to see if you qualify:

- Apply anytime online at [mtlsa.org](http://mtlsa.org);
- Call our Helpline at 1-800-666-6899 (Helpline hours are limited).

### **What help can I find at MLSA?**

- Legal advice and representation;
- Referrals to volunteer attorneys and other providers;
- Self-help clinics and materials.

### **[www.MontanaLawHelp.org](http://www.MontanaLawHelp.org)**

Need legal information or forms? Visit [www.MontanaLawHelp.org](http://www.MontanaLawHelp.org).

Can't find what you want? Use LiveHelp. Click on the LiveHelp picture and get help finding the information you need.

### **[www.MTLISA.org](http://www.MTLISA.org)**

Find copies of all our brochures online. They are all available for free download!

This pamphlet is meant to give basic legal information, not legal advice about your problem. The law changes often and each case is different. We recommend you talk to an attorney about your legal problem.

## **Montana Legal Services Association**

### **Public Benefits:**

### **SNAP (Food Stamps)**



*Providing, protecting, and enhancing access to justice.*

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