



FOOD INSECURITY

Understanding Food Insecurity and Food Resources

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One in nine Americans struggles to have access to enough food, also known as food insecurity. When households have trouble getting enough food, this can lead to stress and other health problems. Many resources can provide help to get food. One of the most well known food resources is a food pantry.

What is a food pantry?

A food pantry is a place where individuals or families can receive food items for free. Food pantries are different from grocery stores in a few ways. Food pantries are usually open only a few hours each week. Also, some pantries let people choose the foods they can take, but some pantries provide a container of foods already selected.

Who can shop at a food pantry?

Some food pantries have rules about who can receive food to make sure that food goes to those most in need. Contacting the local food pantry (some have websites) is the best way to learn about who can use its services.

What kinds of foods does a food pantry offer?

Food pantries often provide non-perishable food, meaning the food items can be stored at room temperature and do not require much preparation to eat. Some common items found at food pantries are:

- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Packaged grains (pasta, cereal, rice, etc.)
- Canned soups

Sometimes fruit and vegetables, bread, meat, and other fresh items are available.

Where does food pantry food come from?

Food pantries receive foods from food banks, which are warehouses that store donated food. Food banks receive food from local and national resources, such as food drives and donations, extra products from businesses, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), or a national hunger-relief agency such as Feeding America. To find a local food pantry, visit www.foodpantries.org

FEATURED FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

If struggling to find a local food pantry, there are other food assistance resources available like SNAP.

What is SNAP?

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is a federal benefits program that helps individuals and families pay for food at stores. There are local SNAP offices in each state to manage SNAP programs.

How is SNAP accessed?

Households must apply for SNAP benefits. People can use SNAP benefits like cash to buy food items at any approved grocery store, farmers market, or co-op. Applications and benefits for each state can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory.



What food choices are right for families?

Many factors affect what foods are right for each person. Age, food allergies, mental health, and other health conditions all affect the food choices people make. Instead of focusing on “right” or “wrong” food choices, think of foods as providing energy for daily activities and helping to feel satisfied. Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables, meats, and beans are all great sources of easy and more affordable food people can find year-round.

Who can help sort out myths and facts about food choices?

Every state has agencies that provide free education about food, called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). These free programs help navigate community-specific food resources. To find local SNAP-Ed agencies, visit <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/state-snap-ed-programs>. Trained nutrition experts can also help sort out nutrition needs.

Where to learn more

Feeding America: www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america

Food Finders: www.food-finders.org

MyPlate: www.choosemyplate.gov

Find a Dietitian: www.eatright.org/find-an-expert

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