



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Eligible Food Items *(Last Published: 07/18/2014)*

Households CAN use SNAP benefits to buy:

- Foods for the household to eat, such as:
 - breads and cereals;
 - fruits and vegetables;
 - meats, fish and poultry; and
 - dairy products.
- Seeds and plants which produce food for the household to eat.

In some areas, restaurants can be authorized to accept SNAP benefits from qualified homeless, elderly, or disabled people in exchange for low-cost meals.

Households CANNOT use SNAP benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco
- Any nonfood items, such as:
 - pet foods
 - soaps, paper products
 - household supplies
 - Vitamins and medicines
- Food that will be eaten in the store
- Hot foods

Additional Information

“Junk Food” & Luxury Items

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (the Act) defines eligible food as any food or food product for home consumption and also includes seeds and plants which produce food for consumption by SNAP households. The Act precludes the following items from being purchased with SNAP benefits: alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, hot food and any food sold for on-premises consumption. Nonfood items such as pet

foods, soaps, paper products, medicines and vitamins, household supplies, grooming items, and cosmetics, also are ineligible for purchase with SNAP benefits.

- Soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, and ice cream are food items and are therefore eligible items
- Seafood, steak, and bakery cakes are also food items and are therefore eligible items

Since the current definition of food is a specific part of the Act, any change to this definition would require action by a member of Congress. Several times in the history of SNAP, Congress had considered placing limits on the types of food that could be purchased with program benefits. However, they concluded that designating foods as luxury or non-nutritious would be administratively costly and burdensome. Further detailed information about the challenges of restricting the use of SNAP benefits can be found here:

Report -- [Implications of Restricting the use of Food Stamp Benefits:](#)

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/arra/FSPFoodRestrictions.pdf>

Energy Drinks

When considering the eligibility of energy drinks, and other branded products, the primary determinant is the type of product label chosen by the manufacturer to conform to Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines:

- Energy drinks that have a nutrition facts label are eligible foods
- Energy drinks that have a supplement facts label are classified by the FDA as supplements, and are therefore not eligible

Live Animals

Generally live animals and birds are not eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits. Live fish such as lobsters and other shellfish may be purchased with SNAP benefits.

Pumpkins, Holiday Gift Baskets, and Special Occasion Cakes

Pumpkins are edible and eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits. However, inedible gourds and pumpkins that are used solely for ornamental purposes are not eligible items.

Gift baskets that contain both food and non-food items, are not eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits if the value of the non-food items exceeds 50 percent of the purchase price. To read our most recent notice about Gift Baskets (http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/arra/Retailer_Notice_111412.pdf).

Items such as birthday and other special occasion cakes are eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits as long as the value of non-edible decorations does not exceed 50 percent of the purchase price of the cake.