

Getting Started with Food and Nutrition Services



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

In support of your Whole Health and well-being, this guide will help you understand the healthy food classes and nutrition services available from VA and USDA, and help you apply for food assistance benefits if needed.

Choose VA

Are you and your family members getting enough nutrition?

VA's Nutrition and Food Services (NFS) and the U.S Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) are working together to address Veterans' nutritional needs and food insecurity.

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity means your access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources.

What programs are available to me and my family members?

Some of the programs available to Veterans and their family members include:

- USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Helps low-income individuals and families buy nutritious food with an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, which appears similar to a debit card.
- USDA SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) - SNAP recipients can receive services through the SNAP E&T Program which helps participants gain the skills, training, or work experience they need to increase their ability to obtain regular employment and meet the needs of employers.
- VA MOVE! – A Weight Management Program that is available to every Veteran receiving VA health care and provides Veterans with a variety of ways to participate in a comprehensive lifestyle intervention.
- VHA Healthy Teaching Kitchen - A VA program thru which Veterans learn to prepare, cook, and eat healthy dishes that support nutrition and self-care.
- VHA Whole Health - A VA program that empowers and equips you to take charge of your health and well-being. It centers around **what matters to you**, not what is the matter with you. This means your health team will get to know you and develop a personalized health plan specifically for you, taking into account your values, needs, and goals to live your best life.

NOTE: You do not need to be enrolled in the VA system to participate in SNAP. For more information, please visit: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility

HOW DO I APPLY FOR SNAP?

You must apply for SNAP in the state where you currently live because each state has a different application form and process. A member of your household must contact your state agency directly to apply.

WHAT DO I DO IF I AM PHYSICALLY UNABLE TO GO TO A SNAP OFFICE OR CONTACT THE OFFICE?

If you are unable to go to or call your local SNAP office and do not have access to the internet, you may have another person act as your authorized representative by applying and being interviewed on your behalf. You must designate your authorized representative in writing.

Note: Please contact your SNAP state agency directly to apply and to request information about the status of your application. USDA FNS does not process applications or have access to case information.

WHERE CAN I GET MY STATE SNAP INFORMATION?

You can contact your state agency by visiting your local SNAP office, visiting your state agency's website, or calling the toll-free SNAP Information Number at 1-800-221-5689. You can find your state SNAP agency online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory>

How do I get into VA Nutrition and Food Programs?

What you eat is very important to your health. Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) provide nutrition education and counseling for Veterans across VHA's health care facilities and most clinics. There are many programs, telehealth visits, groups, or individual appointments available to you. Visit <https://www.nutrition.va.gov> to learn more.

How do I get help from a Dietitian?

RDNs are VA's food and nutrition experts. RDNs have special training to offer medical nutrition therapy and work as part of the health care team and Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) in the treatment and prevention of disease. RDNs promote healthy lifestyle choices and create personal nutrition plans for individuals of all ages using a Whole Health approach. To contact a dietitian:

- Call your local VA to schedule an appointment
- Ask your local VA about same day appointment availability
- Ask your VA PACT or health care team for a referral
- Send a secure message via MyHealthVet by signing in at: www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home

How do I avoid gaining weight or how do I lose weight?

MOVE! is a weight management, health promotion program designed to improve the lives of Veterans. MOVE!'s core ideas—encouraging healthy eating behavior, increasing physical activity, and promoting even small weight losses—are easy to follow and based on the latest nutrition science. With the help of your MOVE! care team, you can reduce health risks, prevent or reverse certain diseases, improve your quality of life, and even live longer! For more information about MOVE! visit www.move.va.gov

What foods should I eat?

MyPlate is the Federal nutrition symbol, developed by the USDA that serves as a general healthy eating guide on what and how much to eat from each of the five food groups – fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy. To learn what the right amounts are for you to eat and drink based on your age, sex, height, weight and activity level, etc. Get your own MyPlate Plan at www.myplate.gov/myplateplan.

MyPlate encourages simple ways to get started on eating healthy. Download the Start Simple with MyPlate app on your phone to set simple, achievable, daily goals to help you eat healthy or visit www.MyPlate.gov for more tips and resources to get started today.

OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

How do I know if I am eligible for SNAP?

You must meet certain income and resource requirements to be eligible for SNAP and receive benefits. If your state agency determines you are eligible to receive SNAP benefits, you will receive benefits backdated to when you submitted your application.

Are there other USDA programs my family and I may be eligible for?

You or your family members may be eligible for assistance through other USDA programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the Summer Food Service Program and USDA food distribution programs. Please visit the USDA FNS website at: www.fns.usda.gov/partnerships/military-veteran-families for a complete listing of nutrition assistance programs that may be available to you.

Helpful Links

USDA SNAP

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

USDA SNAP E&T

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/et>

VHA NFS FOOD INSECURITY:

https://www.nutrition.va.gov/Food_Insecurity.asp

VHA NFS RECIPES:

<https://www.nutrition.va.gov/Recipes.asp>

GET HELP FROM A DIETITIAN

https://www.nutrition.va.gov/Get_Help_from_a_Dietitian.asp

WHOLE HEALTH

<https://www.va.gov/wholehealth>

VA MEDICAL CENTER LOCATOR

<https://www.va.gov/find-locations>

WIC

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>

MYPLATE

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov>