

# Food Banks and Food Pantries

Do you find it hard to buy healthy foods? You are not alone. More than six out of ten older adults say they must choose between food or paying for utilities, transportation, or medical care.

Food pantries can be helpful to those who may have emergency needs. They can also be helpful for anyone who may or may not qualify for federal assistance.

## What is a food bank?

A food bank is a nonprofit organization that acts as a food storage and distribution center for smaller front-line agencies, such as food pantries. They usually do not give out food directly to people, but they may have staff that can assist you with getting benefits, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of families in need so they can purchase healthy food. Food banks often rely heavily on donors and volunteers to carry out their daily operations.

## What is a food pantry?

A food pantry is an agency found in your community that provides food and other resources to those in need. Many food pantry programs are now offering mobile pantry programs, which travel around communities to make it easier for people to access food. Some food pantries allow you to “grocery shop” while others provide standard boxes of food.

There are often volunteer opportunities, and they can help connect you to other resources that you may need. Food pantries may provide monthly groceries for older adults, emergency food boxes, and assistance with applying for federal assistance programs.

## How can I eat healthily?

If you do not have enough healthy food to eat, it can lead to Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity, so eating healthy foods is important. There are many foods that can provide added nutrients at lower costs. Canned

foods, bananas, and potatoes are just a few that can provide nutrients and are lower in cost.



When choosing your food at the food pantry, try following the [Supporting Wellness at Pantries \(SWAP\)](#) system developed by the Connecticut Foodshare Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions.

SWAP's color-coded system provides guidance on what foods to choose:

**Green means choose often.** These are foods that support health, such as produce; lean meats; low-fat dairy products; low salt canned items; and items low in fat, sodium, and sugar.

**Yellow means choose sometimes.** These are food that can contribute to good health, such as pastas; no added salt canned goods; and items with medium levels of fat, sodium, or sugar.

**Red means choose rarely.** These foods provide limited health benefits, and they include high-fat meats; highly processed food items, like macaroni and cheese; and high sodium, fat, and sugar items.

## Follow these tips to find the resources you need.

- Ask for help! There are services for everyone, and it does not take benefits away from others.
- Call your Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and let them know you need help. Go to the [Eldercare Locator](#) and put in your zip code to find the ADRC in your area.
- Talk to a senior center director or local food pantry about applying for help.
- Find a food bank in your area by going to [Feeding America's website](#) and entering in your state or zip code. The website will give you a list of food banks closer to the area where you live.
- Apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. You can find help applying for SNAP by going to [Feeding America's website](#) and putting in your zip code.