

THE ARIZONA SNAP EXPERIENCE

What items can I purchase with my \$29 during the SNAP Experience?

Experience participants should spend their SNAP budget of \$29 only on items eligible for purchase through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. As per USDA guidelines:

Households **CAN** use the 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 (NOT recommended for the Experience unless it's a plant which is ready to harvest, such as fresh basil).

Households **CANNOT** use the SNAP benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco;
- Any nonfood items, such as:
 - Pet foods;
 - Soaps, paper products; and
 - Household supplies.
- Vitamins and medicines.
- Foods that come hot/prepared at the point of purchase (rotisserie chicken, pre-made sandwich, etc.).

What can the optional additional \$12 purchase?

The SNAP Experience is based on a budget of \$29 for one week, which amounts to the average benefit an individual in Arizona received in July 2011 (\$126.29/month * 12 months /52weeks, rounded). Experience participants, however, are permitted to use an additional \$12 throughout the week to help supplement their SNAP budget. This amounts to an additional 30% of the week's budget (rounded). This additional money can be used for any purchase you wish, including purchases that are not allowed on the SNAP budget (see above). You may opt to use this money, or you may opt not to use it to experience what it's like to rely solely on SNAP for your week's food budget.

How can I stretch my SNAP budget?

The USDA recommends that SNAP recipients buy raw ingredients whenever possible, to maximize their benefits. However, you can plan your meals however you choose: buying food for the week, shopping multiple times during the week, buying in bulk where affordable, and buying produce frozen, canned, or fresh. SNAP benefits can be combined with coupons and store discount cards, but if you don't already get a newspaper you may wish to consider whether you could afford to buy one for the coupons while living on a SNAP budget.

Be sure to check our blog and read through our 2010 and 2011 Archives for more ideas on how to stretch your SNAP budget.

If I don't have enough money for the week, can I go get a food box?

While many SNAP participants stretch their budget through the assistance of food co-operatives, food pantries, and food banks, we respectfully request that Experience participants not do so. Our reason for this is simple: your need is temporary for one week and done for the purposes of the SNAP Experience, but for thousands of individuals and families, those resources are a life line. Using a food box or other food donation during your Experience makes it more difficult for a household truly in need to get assistance. We do, however, encourage you to seek out a food bank, food pantry, or other meal provider and volunteer during the week of the Experience to gain first-hand perspective on the amazing work done by these providers and the process of getting assistance that those in need face.

To find a location to volunteer, please visit

<http://www.azfoodbanks.org/images/uploads/Complete%20Directory%2001-11.pdf>

How do the *MyPlate* recommendations from the USDA play into this Experience?

In the past, Arizona and many other states have hosted the Food Stamp Challenge (see more about that here: <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snapfood-stamps/snapfood-stamp-challenges/>). Times are rapidly changing, and while we see sharp increases in Arizona in SNAP enrollment (23% more individuals received SNAP in July 2012 than in July 2009) we also see increasing obesity in our state. The USDA recently replaced the old Food Pyramid with the new *MyPlate* icon in an effort to more clearly illustrate a healthy approach to food. Since its release in June of 2011, many have debated whether the *MyPlate* recommendations are obtainable for low-income households. We asked this question:

Can an individual or family eat what could be considered a healthy and balanced diet on a SNAP budget?

The Arizona SNAP Experience was born from this conversation. We invite participants to experience what 1.1 MILLION Arizonans deal with every month: Trying to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a SNAP budget.

We hope that SNAP Experience participants will follow the *MyPlate* guidelines as closely as possible throughout the week of the Experience. As you plan your week and incorporate the *MyPlate* recommendations into meal planning, shopping, and your daily intake, reflect on the experience. Is it easy or difficult to follow the USDA's recommendations with your SNAP budget? How well are you able to adhere to the recommendations? Does your diet tend to fall in line with the *MyPlate* recommendations when you're not participating in the SNAP Experience?

For more on *MyPlate*, please see the *MyPlate* Information Sheet or go to <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

Where can I find more resources?

There are several resources for healthy eating on a budget. You may wish to start with these:

- The Arizona Nutrition Network's Resources

<http://www.eatwellbewell.org/parents/resources>

- USDA's Recipes and Tips for Healthy, Thrifty Meals

<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/MiscPubs/FoodPlansRecipeBook.pdf>