

Indiana Legal Services, Inc

Using the law to fight poverty, empower clients, and improve access to justice.

www.indianalegalservices.org

Reading Your Food Stamp Budget

What is a Food Stamp Budget?

The amount of food stamps that you should receive is based on your income and expenses. This is your Food Stamp Budget. You can get a copy of your Food Stamp Budget from your caseworker. You must keep this information accurate and updated by telling your caseworker about any changes (you should do this in writing if possible). If you receive too many food stamps, you will have to pay back the amount you should not have received. You can be disqualified from the program for intentionally giving incorrect information.

What information is used in my Food Stamp Budget?

Your household size, income, and expenses are used to calculate your Food Stamp Budget.

What income is included in my Food Stamp Budget?

The first figures on your Food Stamp Budget represent the amount of monthly income that you receive. All types of income, including SSI, TANF, Social Security benefits, wages, and child support, are included in your Food Stamp Budget. If your household income is over the income limit, you are not eligible for food stamps even if you have high expenses, unless someone in your household is elderly or disabled.

What are deductions?

The next few lines on your Food Stamp Budget contain “deductions”. Deductions are certain expenses that affect the amount of food stamps you can receive. The more deductions you have, the more food stamps you can receive.

Which of my expenses count as deductions?

- Medical costs over \$35.00/month (if you or a household member are elderly or disabled).
- Child care expenses (if you need child care in order to continue working).
- Child support (if you pay child support by court order to a person who is not in your household).
- Part of your shelter and utility costs if these expenses are high compared to your income.

What is the shelter deduction?

Your Food Stamp Budget should include a deduction for your shelter costs including utilities, if your shelter costs are high compared to your income. Shelter costs include rent, mortgage payments, property taxes, renters or homeowners insurance, charges for heating, cooling, and cooking fuel; electricity, water, and sewage; trash collection fees; and any other utility installation fees, including telephone installation. If you are homeless, you also may receive a shelter deduction.

If it is too hard to provide your caseworker with monthly verification of your **actual** utility costs, then you might want to take the **standard** utility deduction, which is an estimated dollar amount of the average person's utility costs. You should choose the utility deduction (actual or standard) that will give you the highest deduction.

What if my situation changes?

You need to immediately tell your caseworker of any changes, and you should put the changes in writing if possible. You have 10 days to report a change. You should keep a record of your income and expenses and a copy of whatever you provide to your caseworker every time you report a change.

How can I make sure that my caseworker makes the correct changes to my Food Stamp Budget?

If you report changes to your caseworker, you should receive a corrected Food Stamp Budget in the mail. If you don't receive a corrected Food Stamp Budget, you should ask your caseworker for a copy soon after you report any changes. You should make sure that your caseworker has correctly entered the changes, any change you report should go into effect during the month after you report a change if it results in an increase in your food stamps.

If the change results in a decrease in your food stamps, you should receive at least 10 days advance written notice of the decrease.

What if my Food Stamp Budget is wrong, or shows wrong information?

You can appeal any action that affects your benefits. To appeal, write down on a piece of paper that you want to appeal the decision. Send the paper by certified mail, or take the paper, to your caseworker. Be sure to keep a copy of that paper, and write down the date that you gave or sent it to your caseworker. You can contact a private attorney or your local legal services office for help with your appeal.

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