

Eat Free

There are a wide variety of different programs offering support, assistance, food, and access to food, throughout the world, but the programs vary by location and accessibility. You will likely need to do some sleuthing on your own to locate the best course of action in your area, but below are a variety of starting points.

I highly suggest employing *all* of these strategies, as you may be declined for some, placed on waiting lists for others, passed along to other resources, etc. Don't stop at just one. Cover all bases, then work to cover the covered bases.

The National Hunger Hotline: 1-866-3-HUNGRY

I called them to find out their services. The woman I was transferred to was quick, kind, and helpful. Ultimately, however, her role is limited to putting people in contact with WIC, SNAPs, Meals on Wheels, and/or various Food Pantries in your area. That said, it's a single number you can call to learn about specific resources in your location.

Because the qualifications, eligibility, and resources vary so much, I'm unable to offer specific information, but as an overview, the following are common around the United States (with similar services offered around the world. Start researching online to find similar services in your own country).

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [formerly "food stamps"]): A federal nutrition program designed to help families and individuals stretch their food budgets. The qualifications vary by state, so you will need to contact your own state's SNAP agency. Ultimately, however, you will need to provide proof of resource and income limits (special rules apply for the elderly and/or disabled). There appears to be a rough 30-day turnaround time for the process, which will additionally include an eligibility interview. Thankfully, if you're approved, the benefits will be backdated to the date of your application. You will be sent an EBT card (like a debit card), which can be used at authorized food stores and retailers. Thankfully, the EBT card can be used to purchase quality meats and produce.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children): Pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 are eligible. As with SNAP, you must meet income guidelines, as well as a state residency requirement, and additionally be individually determined to be at "nutritional risk" by a health professional. However, beyond just supplemental nutritious food, nutritional education, counseling, screening and referrals to other health, welfare, and social services are included as a part of this federal grant program.

Meals on Wheels: This is a program intended for senior citizens (typically people over 60 years of age). However, they offer nutritious meals, companionship, and lend a watchful eye for the health and safety of seniors. There are great online sources to locate a provider near you.

Food Banks (and Food Pantries): Food banks are typically large warehouses that store, sort, and distribute foods to a variety of local food pantries and other resources in a wide network of communities. Contact The National Hunger Hotline to find services in your area. As with the other services, there are eligibility requirements. However, they will typically offer a variety of food packages, from just a few days, to upwards of a month. These are free for the eligible, but you're limited to whatever is contained within the package.

National School Lunch Program: The NSLP is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or no-cost lunches to children each school day. Again, there are limits and eligibility requirements, but for families with children, it is worth looking into this program. As a complement to this program, look into the **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**.

United Way 211: Similar to The National Hunger Hotline, they will put you in touch with resources in your area, but this extends beyond just food and nutrition, going deeper into healthcare, mental health, disaster, and emergency

resources. Contact them, by dialing “211”, or by visiting their website at “211.org”. Explain your situation, then follow their advice.

NoKidHungry.com: This website hosts a great map (The Free Meal Finder) showing where children may be offered a free meal, in your area. It seems spotty, but it is national. It’s worth a look!

Commodity Supplemental Food Program: The CSFP works to improve the health of low-income elderly persons at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious, 100 percent domestic USDA Foods.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations: If you live on an Indian reservation or are part of a Native American family living either near a reservation or in Oklahoma, you may be eligible for this service. FDIIR provides USDA foods to income-eligible families who meet any of the previously mentioned requirements.

Beyond all of this, find as many free meals as possible, be it from friends, relatives, churches, shelters, etc. Be respectful, but try to adhere to your way of eating, as much as possible. That said, if things are dire and you’re unsure where your next meal may come from... *take the free meal*. It may be a while. Don’t be picky, when the options are that limited.

Now, let’s say you get some free carby foods, such as rice, fruit, beans, etc. Again, eat them. Short term survival is important, in order to stabilize. However, if you’re able, work to extend or dilute them with other fatty or protein-heavy ingredients. This will help diminish blood sugar spikes, which can cause a crash and cravings, leading to hunger pangs.

Anything Else?

This is a living document. If anyone has any further thoughts or suggestions to add to this, please send me an email or visit my contact page, on my website. I can add it to this document and let people know it’s been modified. I truly want to help, but I’m only one person with finite resources.

Help me turn this into something that can really help others!

Thank you!

DJ Foodie

ElDuderino@DJFoodie.com

www.DJFoodie.com