

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Households CANNOT use SNAP benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco
- Any nonfood items, such as:
 - pet foods
 - soaps, paper products
 - household supplies
- Vitamins and medicines
- Food that will be eaten in the store
- Hot foods

Additional Information

“Junk Food” & Luxury Items

The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (the Act) defines eligible food as any food or food product for home consumption and also includes seeds and plants which produce food for consumption by SNAP households. The Act precludes the following items from being purchased with SNAP benefits: alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, hot food and any food sold for on-premises consumption. Nonfood items such as pet foods, soaps, paper products, medicines and vitamins, household supplies, grooming items, and cosmetics, also are ineligible for purchase with SNAP benefits.

- Soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, and ice cream are food items and are therefore eligible items
- Seafood, steak, and bakery cakes are also food items and are therefore eligible items
Since the current definition of food is a specific part of the Act, any change to this definition would require action by Congress. Several times in the history of SNAP Congress considered placing limits on the types of food that could be purchased with program benefits. However, they concluded that designating foods as luxury or non-nutritious would be administratively costly and burdensome. Further detailed information about the challenges of restricting the use of SNAP benefits can be found here: