

FEDERAL PROGRAM STRETCHES BUDGETS

Diane Stacy is a nutrition educator and coach and practices Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). Diane has a master's degree in holistic nutrition, a certificate in nutritional counseling, an advanced EFT Certificate of Completion, and a bachelor's degree in medical technology. Diane writes monthly nutrition articles for Senior Digest. This article is published in the December 2007 issue. Diane can be reached at (401) 949-2917 or dchoices@verizon.net. Her website is www.choicesandprevention.com.

Not often do you hear someone say they like to pay taxes. I don't mind if I know the taxes are justified and going to a good cause. The Food Stamp Program is one of the most successful federal nutrition programs in our country. The federal taxes that support this program are well spent. Each year the Food Stamp Program helps thousands of low-income families buy more nutritious food. Unfortunately, there are about 60,000 people in RI that are eligible for Food Stamp benefits, but are not receiving them. Since 2001, the RI Food Stamp Outreach Project has been working to increase access to the program and assist potentially eligible clients. Anyone who qualifies is entitled to the benefits and no one is taking away from someone else.

Diane K. Stacy
February 8, 2008

Food Stamp benefits help to stretch your food budget. This is especially important, as your fixed income can't keep up with rising costs for food, rent, utilities, transportation, medications, and general household budget items. To maximize your benefits further, buy nutritious foods when on sale and use coupons.

The Food Stamp benefits now come on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to completely guarantee privacy. It looks like a credit card, so you probably haven't noticed just how many people shop with help from the Food Stamp Program. Seniors who have less than \$3000 in resources and whose monthly income is below \$985 (\$1,275 for a household of 2) may be eligible. Your benefit amount is determined by your expenses. You can call the Food Stamp Outreach Project toll free at 1-866-306-0270 to get information, find out about Food Stamp eligibility and to learn how to apply for the new Food Stamp benefits card.

In June of this year, an on-line application was launched to allow people to apply directly to the Food Stamp program from any computer with internet access. The on-line application reduces at least some of the barriers of a paper application, speeds up the initial application and protects people's privacy. Don't worry if you don't have a computer. The Oceanstate libraries have

been contacted about the new on-line web application and volunteers from the Junior League of RI and from Women Ending Hunger at the RI Community Food Bank are visiting the libraries to provide a binder with basic guidance for completing the application and a resource binder with eligibility criteria.

Using the EBT card is easy. Almost any kind of food can be purchased with food stamp benefits with the exception of hot, prepared foods and non-food items. When you checkout there will be a machine where you swipe your EBT card. There will be a picture showing which way to hold the card. You will press the button labeled *EBT* or *food stamps* or *FS*. When prompted by the machine, you will enter your secret code (your personal identification number, PIN). The last step is to confirm the dollar amount is correct by pressing *enter*. The amount of benefits remaining in your food stamp account will be printed on the bottom of your receipt.

Don't deprive yourself of good nutritious meals. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) published a report stating 30% to 40% of cancers are directly linked to our diets and related factors, such as maintaining a healthy weight and staying physically active. Food you choose each day are one of the most important factors in protecting you against cancer, heart

FEDERAL PROGRAM STRETCHES BUDGETS

disease, stroke and a variety of other health problems.

The American Heart Association recommends eating a wide variety of foods each day. The suggested number of servings for a daily intake of 1,600 calories includes 6 servings of grains, 3 – 4 servings of vegetables, 4 servings of fruits, 2 –3 servings of fat-free or low-fat dairy products, 3 – 6 ounces of cooked lean meats, poultry & seafood, and 2 servings of fats and oils. Three to 4 servings of nuts, seeds and legumes per week are also recommended. Your calorie intake will depend on your age, activity and goals to loose, gain or maintain your weight.

If you struggle to pay your bills and can't afford nutritious meals, call 1-866-306-0270 to see if you qualify for Food Stamp benefits.