

Eldercare Q&A

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SNAP (Food Stamp) Photo IDs

Q: I am a senior: do I need a photo on my food stamp card?

A: Probably not. A new Massachusetts state law requires that certain Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cardholders have their photo on their card. . If you receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) or cash benefits, you may get a letter from the state about the new photo EBT card. About half of SNAP households will have a photo EBT card—but a photo is not needed if the head of your household is: age 60 or older; disabled or blind; under age 19; a victim of domestic violence; or if you have a sincere religious objection to a photo.

There are a lot more Massachusetts residents getting SNAP benefits today than ever before. In 2004 a total of 334,939 people in the Commonwealth received SNAP benefits. By December of 2013, there were 876,992 people using SNAP benefits. The program has grown more than 2 ½ times larger than it was a decade ago..

The impact of the SNAP program on participating families---and the state's economy---is significant. The average monthly SNAP benefit last year was \$130.92, or \$1,571 per year. That means the SNAP program put \$1.37 billion into the Massachusetts economy in food purchases..

You can be working and still qualify for SNAP benefits. The state has been making it easier for seniors to get a SNAP card. The application for seniors is only 2 pages—shorter than for other applicants. And using SNAP benefits is completely confidential. At the check-out counter, SNAP recipients use a card which works just like a debit card. Your SNAP benefits are kept in a special account for you until you want to use them. If you spend more than \$35 per month on medical expenses including medications and doctor's visits, you may qualify for a \$90 standard deduction. which could result in a higher monthly SNAP benefit.

Under state law, every SNAP household member has the right to use the EBT card. Stores cannot refuse to accept the EBT card from household members, such as spouses or older children. This is true even if their name or photo is not on the card. In addition, if you're unable to get out of the house, any caregiver you authorize can also use your EBT card to food shop for you. Your card has a Personal Identification Number (PIN) that keeps your benefits safe and is your electronic signature. If the proper PIN is used with your card, your caregiver should be able to use the card.

Stores are not allowed to treat SNAP recipients differently from any other shoppers. A store clerk cannot ask to see your EBT photo card unless they routinely ask everyone using credit or debit cards to show a photo ID. Stores that accept EBT cards cannot set up "SNAP-only" checkout lines or discriminate against SNAP households. If a member of your household is not allowed to use your EBT card, or if you think you are being discriminated against, call your local Legal Services, or go to www.masslegalhelp.org for advice. To apply for SNAP, call 1-866-950-FOOD.