



MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE

Finding solutions to poverty and improving the lives of people with low income in Maine.

Food Supplement Benefits Limited to 3 Months for Some People

What is the new 3-Month Time Limit on Food Supplement Benefits?

If you are:

- Between the ages of 18 and 50; **AND**
- Do not have minor children at home

You may only be able to get Food Supplement (FS) benefits for 3 months during a 36-month period.

Example: You got FS benefits in October, November and December of 2014. You may not be able to get FS benefits again until October, 2017 unless you fall into one of the groups listed below.

Does the 3-Month limit apply to everyone between 18 and 50?

NO. The 3-month limit on benefits will **not** apply to you if you are:

1. Working **or** in an approved FS work or training program for at least 20 hours a week;
2. Medically certified as physically or mentally unfit to work for at least 30 hours a week (see more information below);
3. Taking care of a child under age 18 even if the child is not yours;
4. Caring for an adult with a disability even if that person does not live with you;
5. Pregnant;
6. In a substance abuse treatment program;
7. In an approved education program at least half time;
8. Applying for or getting unemployment benefits;
9. Getting disability benefits from a government or private source; or
10. Doing Volunteer Community Service Work (see more below).

Tell DHHS right away if you fit into one of these groups so you do not use up your 3 months!

Your FS benefits will not be limited to 3 months if you are “unfit for employment.” What does that mean?

It means that you cannot work for at least 30 hours a week on a regular basis. You do **NOT** have to get SSI or Social Security Disability benefits to be considered unfit for employment. You may have to give the Department medical certification showing you can't work. This statement can come from a doctor, nurse, nurse practitioner, social worker or other qualified medical practitioner.

How many hours in a month do I have to do volunteer community service work to keep my FS benefits?

If you are in a volunteer community placement you can keep your FS benefits. You must volunteer for the number of hours in a month that equals your FS benefits divided by the State minimum wage.

Example: You get \$120 a month in FS benefits. Divide that by the State minimum wage: \$120 divided by \$7.50 = 16. This means that you must volunteer 16 hours *each month* to keep getting your FS benefits.

What kind of Education and Training Opportunities are available for me?

You may be referred by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), to a Career Center for job search services, or other education and training services. This could include help getting a GED or learning to speak English. Any time you spend in this training will count toward the 20 hours a week training requirement to help you keep your FS benefits.

There are also a limited number of training slots available in the Department of Labor Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP). CSSP can help you get a college degree or credential that may help you get a better job. If you are interested in CSSP tell your local Career Center that you get FS and ask how you can enroll.

Can I get any more FS benefits after 3 months?

Maybe. You can get your FS benefits back, at any time that you fit into one of the groups listed above. If you fit into one of these groups, you should reapply for Food Supplement benefits and contact MEJP right away if you are denied.

You can also get 3 more months of FS benefits in a 3-year period if you:

- Worked or participated in a training program for **80 hours in a 30-day period; OR**
- Participated in a volunteer community placement for **24 hours in a 30-day period; AND**
- Then lose that position even if you are no longer working, training or volunteering.

If you have worked or been in training or volunteered for the number of hours listed above, reapply for FS right away to get another 3 months of benefits. This additional 3-month period is only available **one time** in a 3-year period.

For more information about the 3-month time limit on Food Supplement benefits, call Crystal Bond at Maine Equal Justice Partners: 207-626-7058, ext. 205.