

# Food Insecurity Screening Algorithm for Adults

Download the algorithm at: <http://bit.ly/foodinsecurityscreening>

Screen all adult patients at least once. Screen **high-risk** patients annually.

**High-risk demographics:** 50-65 years old, enrollment in Medicaid, socially isolated

**High-risk clinical indicators:** Frailty, malnutrition, unintentional weight loss, poor appetite, pressure ulcers, diabetes, depression or apathy, poor medication adherence and obesity



## Screening for Food Insecurity Using the Hunger Vital Sign\*™

### Preface Questions with:

"I ask all of my patients about access to food. I want to make sure that you know the community resources that are available to you. Many of these resources are free of charge."

"For each statement, please tell me whether the statement was

**Often True, Sometimes True, or Never True** for your household in the past 12 months."

"Por cada una de las siguientes declaraciones, por favor indique si la declaracion se aplica a su familia **frecuentemente, a veces o nunca** durante los últimos 12 meses."

- 1 "I/We worried whether our food would run out before I/we got money to buy more."  
"Estábamos (Estaba) preocupado(s) de que los alimentos se acabaran antes de que tuviéramos (tuviera) suficiente dinero para comprar más."
- 2 "The food I/we bought just did not last, and I/we did not have money to get more."  
"Los alimentos que compramos (compré) no duraron mucho, y no teníamos (tenía) suficiente dinero para comprar más."

If **Often True** or **Sometimes True** to EITHER STATEMENT, patient is food insecure.

### STEP 1: If food insecure, assess for co-existing risk factors for poor nutrition

- Poor food access (e.g., limited proximity or transportation to stores)
- Frailty or cognitive decline
- Dental problems
- Social isolation
- Lack of appetite (e.g., medication-related, palatability of disease-appropriate diet)
- Limited capacity to prepare food or feed oneself, particularly the inability to complete instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs)
- Lack of cooking or storage equipment

### STEP 2: Code for Food Insecurity

Z59.4: Lack of adequate food and safe drinking water

### STEP 3: Assess weight trajectory

### STEP 4: Refer to Resources

- Sustainable food resources may include:
  - SNAP: formerly Food Stamps
  - Congregate meal sites
  - Home delivered meals (e.g., Meals on Wheels)
  - Medically-tailored meals
  - If children in household: child nutrition programs, like WIC or school meals
- Emergency food resources may include:
  - Food pantries
  - Soup kitchens/free dining rooms
- Enroll in all eligible household benefits (e.g., childcare assistance, Medicaid, utilities/transportation assistance, earned income tax credit, etc.)
- Patient assistance programs for support with medication costs

### STEP 5: Follow-Up at Next Visit

- Referrals to resources
- Weight trajectory
- Food insecurity

# Food Resource Referrals

Refer to a social worker for ongoing support, call a food assistance number below during the visit, or develop an outreach partnership with a hunger relief organization to connect patients with eligible food resources. Providing patients with phone numbers or websites and not facilitating community connections is much less successful.



Refer to federal nutrition programs – Call the **National Hunger Hotline** at **1-866-348-6479** or **1-877-842-6273** (for Spanish)  
 If ineligible for federal nutrition programs and/or emergency food is needed – Call **211** or the **Eldercare Locator** at **1-800-677-1116**  
 To refer older adults to other eligible federal and local benefits – Visit <https://www.benefitscheckup.org>

Food Resources (Eligibility requirements for programs may vary)	Description	Local Information Resources/Programs
<b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*</b> <a href="https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap">https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap</a>	Money on debit card to purchase food. The average benefit is about \$127 per month per person.	
<b>Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program*</b> <a href="https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic">https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic</a>	Money to purchase pre-specified foods for pregnant/post-partum women, infants, and children under the age of 5. Nutrition education and breastfeeding support also provided.	
<b>School, Afterschool, and Summer Meals Programs for Children</b> <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov">http://www.fns.usda.gov</a>	Free or reduced price healthy meals or snacks for students. Eligibility criteria for programs during the school year and summer may vary.	
<b>Food Pantries</b> <a href="http://www.feedingamerica.org">www.feedingamerica.org</a>	Free food and grocery items for people of all ages. Food must be picked-up in person by patient or a proxy.	
<b>Congregate Meal Sites</b>	Meals provided to older adults at specific sites, such as senior centers, churches, or housing communities.	
<b>Home Delivered Meals</b>	Meals delivered to older adults who cannot otherwise prepare or obtain nutritionally adequate meals.	
<b>Medically-Tailored Meals</b>	Home delivered meals tailored to meet the needs of a specific health condition or combination of conditions.	
<b>Soup Kitchens / Free Dining Rooms</b>	Free prepared meals for people of all ages.	

\*Eligibility calculators are available online

For information on developing outreach partnerships with hunger organizations, please visit:  
<http://nopren.org/resource/clinic-to-community-treatment-models/>