

Food Insecurity and Chronic Disease



If you struggle with having enough food for yourself and your family, or struggle to afford nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables, you are not alone. In Alabama, 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 4 children struggle with food insecurity (or having enough food for an active, healthy life). For many people, fixed expenses such as housing and medication are covered first, leaving little for more flexible expenses such as the food budget. Sometimes, this leads to purchasing lower quality food to make sure there's enough to go around.

Food insecurity affects the physical and mental well-being of people of all ages. Many households who struggle with food insecurity include one or more family members living with a chronic disease such as high blood pressure or diabetes. The combination of stress and poor nutrition can make managing a chronic disease even more challenging. Frequently, the time and money spent caring for a chronic disease strains the food budget even more, creating a cycle that increases the risk that the person's health will get worse and the food budget will continue to shrink. Poor dietary intake during pregnancy and early childhood can increase the risk for birth defects, anemia, low birth weight, preterm birth, and other developmental risks.

Food insecurity is particularly high among

- Low income households
- Households with children, especially those with a single parent
- Women and men living alone
- Black and Hispanic households

Are You Experiencing Food Insecurity?

Answering these questions can help you determine if your household is experiencing food insecurity:

1. Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

2. Within the past 12 months, food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

If you answer "sometimes" or "often" to either question, your household is likely experiencing food insecurity. For assistance with food and other resources, **dial 2-1-1** or check out the resources listed on the back.

Food Access Resources

If you or someone you know needs help with having enough food for an active, healthy life, these resources may be able to help.

County Food Guide

Child hunger is one of Alabama's biggest problems, with 1 in 4 children unsure where their next meal will come from. Students facing food insecurity could be 2 years behind their classmates and hunger makes children twice as likely to get sick. However, when kids get nutritious meals, it changes everything. The End Child Hunger in Alabama (ECHA) Task Force's mission is to ensure that every child in Alabama has access to nutritious foods so they can develop into healthy, educated, and productive adults. To find food access resources near you, visit wp.auburn.edu/endchildhungeral/foodguides/ and click on your county to get started.

WIC Program

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a supplemental nutrition program for pregnant women, breastfeeding women, women who had a baby within the last 6 months, infants, and children under the age of 5. Alabama WIC is still open and has modified services throughout the state to help keep WIC families and staff safe. To find out more about the WIC program and if you are eligible to participate, download the free "Alabama WIC" app in your app store, call 1-888-942-4673, or visit alabamapublichealth.gov/wic.

SNAP

The purpose of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is to end hunger and improve nutrition by providing monthly benefits to help eligible low-income households buy the food needed for good health. Call 1-866-465-2285 or visit mydhr.alabama.gov to learn more and apply.

Alabama Child Nutrition Program

The Alabama Child Nutrition Program (CNP) provides nutritious meals to children, and in some cases their families and the community, through programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snacks and the Supper Program, just to name a few! Schools are a fantastic resource for supporting children with the nutrition they need and have become an even more vital resource for families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many schools are providing meals at no cost for kids and at a low cost for adults. Check with your local school district to find out what resources are available in your area.

Food Pantries

Food pantries provide free, perishable and non-perishable items, including dairy products like milk and cheese, fruits, vegetables, bread, canned goods, and frozen meats. The process for picking up food varies, some have a supermarket style of atmosphere, while others provide pre-loaded boxes. Visit foodpantries.org/st/alabama to find a food pantry near you.