

Tip Sheet:

Food Assistance

A healthy diet is important during cancer treatment. Eating nutritious foods—like protein, fruits and vegetables, nuts, and grains—can help you feel better and stay stronger. You may also have special dietary needs because of your diagnosis.

We know that cancer and its side effects can make you feel sick and lose your appetite. We also know that having cancer brings added costs that can make it even harder to afford food. Still, it's very important to have enough nutritious food on hand.

If you are worried about finding and/or paying for food, consider the programs below. To learn more about resources that may be available to you, call 617-632-3301 to speak with a Dana-Farber resource specialist.

Project Bread

We recommend contacting Project Bread as your first step. Project Bread is a nonprofit anti-hunger organization that helps people find healthy food in their neighborhoods, including at food pantries. It also helps with screening and applications for the SNAP and WIC food programs; information about these programs is below.

- Visit www.projectbread.org/get-help.
- Call Project Bread's toll-free FoodSource Hotline: **800-645-8333** or TTY 800-377-1292 (to talk by typing).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

This is a federal program informally known as “food stamps” that helps lower-income people—including families with children, elders, single adults, and people with disabilities—buy nutritious food at supermarkets, most neighborhood grocery stores, pharmacies, and convenience stores. You can use SNAP benefits to buy breads and cereals; fruits and vegetables; meats, fish, and poultry; dairy products; and other food items.

In Massachusetts, SNAP is run by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). To learn whether you qualify for SNAP, use the online calculator at www.mass.gov/snap. You can apply online, by fax, or mail, and the application is available in many languages. If you do not have Internet access, call the DTA Assistance Line at 877-382-2363 and ask to have an application mailed to you. Computers are available at Dana-Farber; see bottom of this sheet.

Notes about SNAP:

- Adults without dependents (children) can receive SNAP benefits for a limited amount of time if they meet other SNAP requirements (e.g., being disabled).
- If you are receiving cancer treatment and can't work, you may be able to receive SNAP for a longer amount of time than usual, even if you are not receiving disability benefits and might be able to work in the future.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program

WIC is a federal program that provides food assistance to pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under age 5. You can use WIC benefits to buy milk, cheese, eggs, bread, cereal, fruit, vegetables, and baby food.

In Massachusetts, WIC is run by the Department of Public Health. You can apply for WIC benefits by calling **800-WIC-1007 (800-942-1007)**, or in person at your local WIC office.

Note about SNAP and WIC

These programs are government benefits. You have some rights when these benefits are denied or stopped. Make sure to open all mail from SNAP or WIC, as there are important **deadlines** to supply more information about your application and appeal negative decisions. It is always a good idea to submit information when it is due, even if you decide not to pursue benefits later. For information about your legal rights related to these benefits programs, a good place to start is the Mass Legal Help website at www.masslegalhelp.org/income-benefits/food-stamps/crisis-tips.

Project Bread will likely refer you to these organizations, but you can call them on your own.

Food Pantries

There are many food pantries and soup kitchens in Massachusetts that help fight hunger. You can find many of them through Project Bread; see details earlier in this information sheet. The Greater Boston Food Bank, one of the largest food banks in the country, has a “food assistance locator” to help you find food sources nearby. Visit www.gbfb.org and click on “Need Food?” at the top.

Two Dollars a Bag

The Two Dollars a Bag program provides large bags of fresh produce for a \$2 suggested donation. They are given out at 30-plus churches, schools, and public housing and senior centers in and near Boston. Each bag has about 12 pounds of assorted produce, such as potatoes, carrots, bananas, and apples. No ID or signup is required. The program is run by the nonprofit Fair Foods. For a schedule, visit www.fairfoods.org and see “Our Services.” Bring your own bag to fill if you can.

Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels is a national program that offers nutritious meals, companionship, and safety checks for seniors. It focuses on elders (most are age 60 and older) who have trouble moving around. Its programs usually require an application, and the fee can range from no cost to full price, depending on your ability to pay. Contact your local Meals on Wheels program to get started. Visit www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org.

Community Servings

Community Servings is a nonprofit that delivers free, nutritious meals to people and families in Massachusetts living with serious illnesses, such as cancer, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS. The service includes a nutritious lunch, dinner, and snack for sick clients, their caregivers, and children, most of whom live at or below the poverty level. Please note that there often is a long waiting list and they have a limited service area. If you live outside the service area, they do have a pick-up option. To learn more, visit www.servings.org. To apply, call 617-632-3301 to speak with a Dana-Farber resource specialist.

2-1-1

The 2-1-1 program is a free and confidential helpline that connects people across the U.S. with health and human services they need, including food. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by phone or computer. A 2-1-1 community representative can put you in touch with local food pantries or other organizations that provide food and nutrition. This program is run by United Way Worldwide. Call **211** or visit www.211.org.

Computer Access to visit these sites

To access the internet during your visits to Dana-Farber (Longwood), consider using one of the free computer workstations in the Blum Patient and Family Resource Center, or borrow an iPad from the Shapiro Center for Patients and Families. Both centers are on the first floor of the Yawkey Center.