

## **SOME SSI RECIPIENTS CAN RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS AUTOMATICALLY**

*By Cathy Roberts, revised April 2011*

*By Dawn Secor, Food Stamp Specialist, Nutrition Consortium of NYS*

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) implemented a demonstration project called the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP) late in 2003. NYSNIP's goal is to automatically enroll all of New York State's SSI (Supplemental Security Income) live-alone recipients into the Food Stamp Program.

For this population, no separate food stamp application, no interview and no separate verification is needed; OTDA relies on information provided by the Social Security Administration (SSA) through the State Data Exchange in order to generate a food stamp case. NYSNIP participants use their existing Medicaid benefit card to access their food stamp benefits. Benefit amounts are standardized, and participants can receive food stamps through NYSNIP for as long as 48 months.

### **Who Can Participate?**

NYSNIP is available only to SSI live-alone recipients – those classified as “living alone” by SSA (i.e. - live by themselves and pay their own food, shelter and clothing expenses). SSI couples and recipients in other living arrangement categories can't participate in NYSNIP, but they can receive food stamps through the regular application process.

SSI live-alone **applicants** won't get food stamp benefits through NYSNIP; only if/when they become SSI **recipients** will their NYSNIP benefits start. Unlike Medicaid or SSI, there is no retroactive NYSNIP eligibility. NYSNIP benefits start the first or second month after the first ongoing SSI check is issued.

### **Benefit amounts and certification period**

Food stamp benefits under NYSNIP are standardized; the food stamp budget is not individualized. The benefit standards take four factors into consideration: cost of shelter, eligibility for the heating/cooling standard utility allowance, presence of other income and geographic location. A chart listing the NYSNIP benefit standards is attached to this article.

Adapted from information provided by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

*Prepared by the Nutrition Consortium of NYS  
Updated April 2011*

One of the guiding principles behind NYSNIP is that *participants should get the same or more food stamp benefits than they would ordinarily receive through the regular food stamp application process*. Anyone who would receive a lower amount should be able to “opt out” of NYSNIP, and enter the regular food stamp application process, if they wish.

New food stamp recipients under NYSNIP will initially receive the minimum benefit level – either \$56 or \$60. However, by filling out and returning a short form included with their NYSNIP opening notice (which asks some questions about the person’s shelter and utility costs), people can get their benefits adjusted up to the maximum food stamp benefit level – as high as \$200.

*New NYSNIP participants must access their food stamp account within 90 days of case opening*. If no food stamp benefits have been redeemed within 60 days, OTDA sends a reminder notice urging the individual to use their food stamp benefits within the next month. The reminder has a list of community agencies that NYSNIP recipients can call for assistance. *(Note: The follow-up letters do not include all the informational materials contained in the original NYSNIP opening notice, but you can get these materials through the Nutrition Consortium – see below.)* At the end of the 90 days, if the person still hasn’t accessed any food stamp benefits, OTDA closes the NYSNIP case. This individual has to go through the regular food stamp application process if s/he wants to rejoin NYSNIP.

The certification period under NYSNIP lasts up to 4 years, with a short mail-in questionnaire required at the midway point. *Recipients MUST return this questionnaire – called an “interim report” -- in order to continue receiving food stamps for the remaining 2 year period*. Participants who lose SSI live-alone status will be taken out of NYSNIP; however, they can still receive regular food stamp benefits, if eligible.

## **Implementation schedule**

In the initial roll-out of NYSNIP, OTDA enrolled about a quarter of a million SSI live-alone recipients across New York State into NYSNIP. More than half of these individuals (roughly 145,000) had already been receiving food stamps when they were put into the NYSNIP project; their cases were converted from “regular” food stamp cases into NYSNIP cases. (Note: conversion is only supposed to occur for those individuals who would get an equal or higher amount of food stamps through NYSNIP.)

Adapted from information provided by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

*Prepared by the Nutrition Consortium of NYS  
Updated April 2011*

Additionally, more than 90,000 *new* food stamp cases were opened for existing SSI live-alone recipients who hadn't already been receiving food stamps. About 60,000 – or 2/3 -- of these individuals accessed their food stamp accounts and continue to receive benefits; the remaining cases closed due to failure to redeem benefits within the requisite time period.

New SSI live-alone recipients not already in receipt of food stamps are being placed into NYSNIP at the minimum benefit level. Included with their opening notice is the shelter questionnaire (the "NYSNIP Food Stamp Case Information Collection Sheet"). Once the local food stamp office receives the person's completed shelter questionnaire, the food stamp benefits can be adjusted to take into account the person's shelter and utility expenses. Any new NYSNIP participant who fails to access their food stamp account within 60 days will get the reminder notice mentioned above, and have an additional 30 days to access their benefits.

## **Where can I find out more about NYSNIP?**

OTDA has released Local Commissioner's Memorandum 04-LCM-13, "the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project," and GIS informational messages 05 TA/DC 003, "NYSNIP non-redeemer reminders and attachments" and 06 TA/DC 012 "New York State Nutrition Improvement Project Benefit Levels." All are posted on OTDA's website at [www.otda.state.ny.us](http://www.otda.state.ny.us).

The Nutrition Consortium has a reproduction of the original NYSNIP opening notice "packets" mailed by OTDA, which include a helpful set of Questions and Answers, the shelter & utility questionnaire and an EBT brochure. We also have a PDF version of the interim report form. You can get a copy of these materials by contacting Dawn Secor at (518) 436-8757, ext. 12, or e-mailing her at [Dawn.Secor@nutritionconsortium.org](mailto:Dawn.Secor@nutritionconsortium.org). Following this article is a quick reference guide that lists the major points about NYSNIP, along with a benefit schedule.

***Please pass this information along to other organizations working with elderly and disabled individuals, and help get the word out about NYSNIP!!!***

Adapted from information provided by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

*Prepared by the Nutrition Consortium of NYS  
Updated April 2011*

## Desk guide about the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP)

Prepared by the Nutrition Consortium of NYS – revised March 2009

### What is the value of NYSNIP?

NYSNIP helps SSI recipients because:

1. the food stamp determination process is **automatic**:
  - no separate food stamp application or eligibility interview is required
  - no additional documentation needs to be collected
2. the benefit should be the **same or higher** than regular food stamps
3. There is generally a **4-year** certification period (as opposed to 1 or 2 years for regular food stamps)

### Other points to remember about NYSNIP:

1. Only SSI live-alone recipients can participate.
2. Enrollment in NYSNIP is *automatic* for SSI live-alone recipients, which means that:
  - Even a person who is adamant that they don't want to get food stamps will have a food stamp case opened. This person can simply decline to access the food stamp account, and the NYSNIP case will eventually be closed – though we would strongly encourage the person to take advantage of the program.
  - Anyone placed into NYSNIP who would get more benefits by utilizing the regular application process can “opt out” of NYSNIP and apply for “regular” food stamps.
3. SSI disability applicants should be strongly encouraged to go through the regular food stamp application process, since the disability determination process often takes a long time and because – unlike NYSNIP benefits -- regular food stamps are paid retroactive to the application date.
4. SSI recipients automatically put into NYSNIP at the minimum benefit level should fill out and return the shelter questionnaire included with their opening notice, so that their benefits can be adjusted to the highest possible level.
5. Some SSI live-alone recipients may not be even be aware that a food stamp account has been opened on their behalf, if they didn't receive the original mailing, or they discarded, ignored or simply didn't understand their notice.
6. NYSNIP recipients can call the state EBT customer service line at **1-888-328-6399** or go to [www.ebtaccount.ipmorgan.com](http://www.ebtaccount.ipmorgan.com) to check their food stamp balance or order a new PIN number. Individuals who can't navigate the hotline or internet site to get a new PIN number can make the request through their local food stamp office.
7. Most NYSNIP participants will receive an interim report (LDSS-4836) after two years. This report **MUST** be completed and returned in order for the person to continue receiving food stamps for two more years. *Failure to return the LDSS-4836 results in case closing.*

# NYSNIP BENEFITS MATRIX BY SHELTER TYPES

*4/1/11*

The New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP) is a pilot project which auto enrolls single SSI live-alone recipients into the Food Stamp Program for up to 4 years.

HOUSEHOLD		MONTHLY FOOD STAMP BENEFIT AMOUNT		
		New York City	Nassau/Suffolk	Upstate
Shelter Type 94 (High Shelter/SUA)	SSI Only	\$200	\$200	\$200
	Other Income	\$200	\$200	\$200
Shelter Type 95 (Low Shelter/SUA)	SSI Only	\$200	\$190	\$168
	Other Income	\$196	\$181	\$159
**Shelter Type 96 (High Shelter/ SUA/\$1 HEAP)	SSI Only	\$200	\$200	\$200
	Other Income	\$200	\$200	\$200
**Shelter Type 97 (Low Shelter/ SUA/\$1 HEAP)	SSI Only	\$200	\$200	\$168
	Other Income	\$196	\$181	\$159
Shelter Type 98 (No Shelter or SUA Data)	SSI Only	\$60	\$60	\$60
	Other Income	\$56	\$56	\$56

**High shelter** = More than \$229/month

**Low shelter** = Less than or equal to \$229/month

**SUA** = Eligible for Level 1 (heating/cooling) SUA

**\*\*SUA/\$1 HEAP** = Eligible for Level 1 (heating/cooling)SUA

**No Shelter/ SUA** = no information on households shelter costs or heating/cooling expenses

**\*\*NOTE CHANGES TO ABOVE TABLE:** Shelter types 96 and 97 are now eligible for a full SUA. This is due to a new initiative that is providing a \$1.00 HEAP benefit to all households that live in public or subsidized housing and do not pay their own heating or cooling cost. This receipt of a HEAP benefit entitles a food stamp household to have the full SUA applied to their food stamp budget. This is true for all food stamp households', not just seniors.

Adapted from information provided by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

*Prepared by the Nutrition Consortium of NYS  
Updated April 2011*