

BARRIERS THAT CONSTRAIN THE ADEQUACY OF SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) ALLOTMENTS (SUMMARY)

Background

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) sponsored a study conducted jointly by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council to examine the feasibility of establishing an objective, evidence-based means of defining the adequacy of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit. The committee reviewed the evidence and concluded that the adequacy of SNAP allotments can be objectively defined. As a first step, the committee recommended that FNS assess the individual, household, and environmental factors—or barriers—that limit the adequacy of SNAP allotments. Hence, this study identifies the barriers that SNAP participants face when trying to achieve a healthy diet through a nationally representative survey of SNAP participants.

The study objectives were: (1) Determine the individual and household barriers; (2) Determine environmental barriers faced by SNAP participants that prevent them from having access to a healthy diet throughout the month; (3) Describe the interaction between these barriers; (4) Among the most frequently reported barriers, detail the nature of the barriers and the coping strategies used; and (5) Determine how, if at all, the barriers can be accounted for in determining SNAP allotments.

Findings

Overall, 88 percent of SNAP participants reported facing some type of barrier to achieving a healthy diet throughout the month. The most common individual or household barrier, reported by 30 percent of participants, was lack of time to prepare meals from scratch that are part of

a healthy diet. Other barriers, reported by 11 to 16 percent of participants, were limited knowledge about healthy food, physical disability, no storage, lack of equipment, or limited cooking skills.

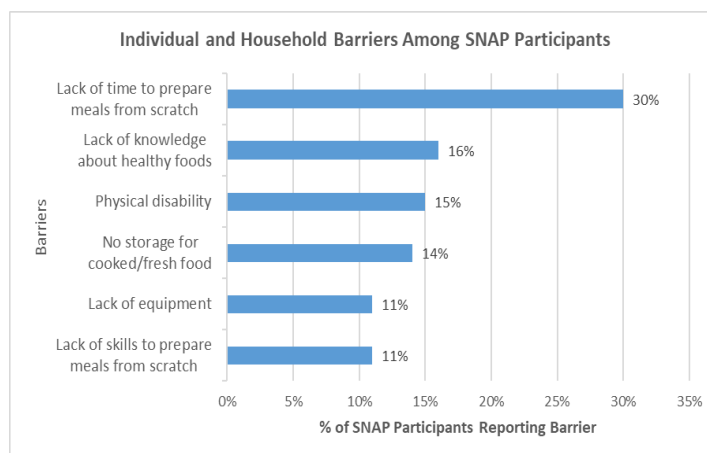
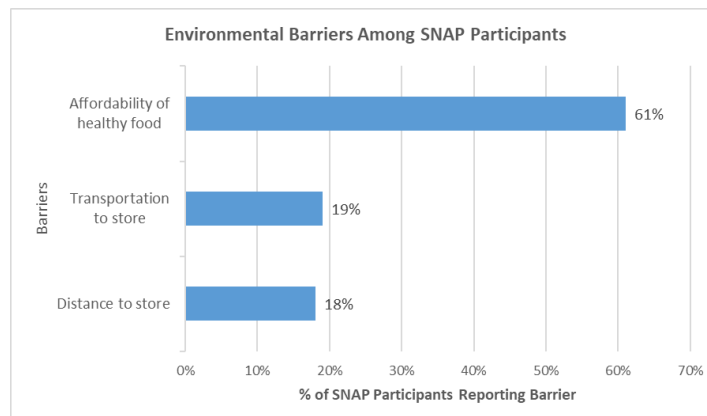


Figure 1

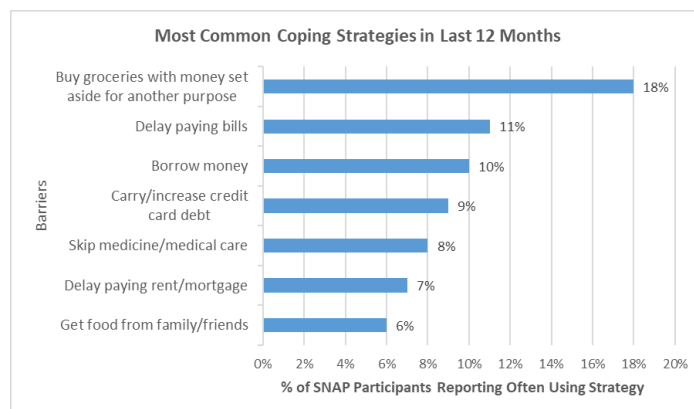
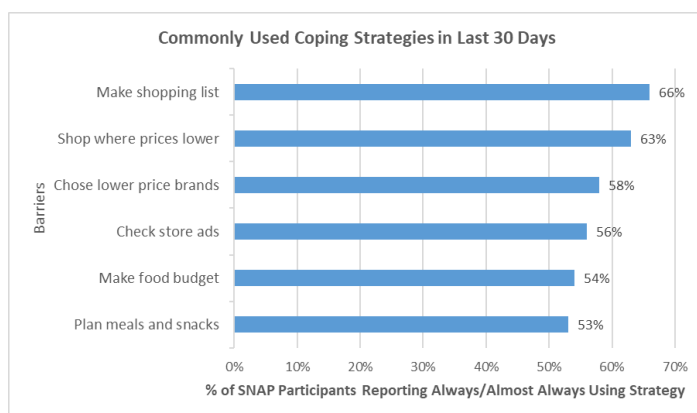
The most common barrier overall, reported by 61 percent of SNAP participants, was the affordability of foods that are part of a healthy diet. Other environmental barriers, reported by nearly 20 percent of participants, were lack of transportation to a grocery store or the distance to a grocery store.



The prevalence of most barriers did not vary by household composition, income sources, education level, urbanicity, or region. Participants in rural areas did report greater travel time to a grocery store. More participants in the northeast reported walking, biking, or taking public transportation as their primary mode of travel for grocery shopping.

Two barriers – affordability and lack of cooking equipment or storage – were associated with household food insecurity. Participants facing an affordability barrier were 2.3 times more likely to experience low or very low household food security. Participants reporting lack of equipment or storage were 1.6 times more likely to experience low or very low household food security. Households with an affordability barrier were also more likely to redeem all their benefits within 2 weeks of issuance and to have multiple assistance programs as their only source of income.

Participants that face barriers to achieving a healthy diet are more likely to use coping strategies. Overall strategies to maximize the food budget were much more common than strategies to increase the amount of money available for food. Coping strategies using social support were much less common.



Methodology

This study includes both a quantitative survey and qualitative in-depth interviews with findings presented in two separate reports. The results from the nationally representative survey (presented in this summary) includes 4,522 completed surveys collected between May and November 2018 from SNAP participants in 26 States. The qualitative report includes findings from in-depth interviews with 121 SNAP participants in 12 States conducted between July and September 2018. While those findings are not included in this summary, they provided additional context for the survey results.

For More Information

Maeve Gearing, Sujata Dixit-Joshi, and Laurie May. *Barriers That Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Allotments: Survey Findings*. Report prepared by Westat, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, June 2021. Project Officer: Rosemarie Downer.

Maeve Gearing, Megan Lewis, Claire Wilson, Carla Bozzolo, and Dani Hansen. *Barriers That Constrain the Adequacy of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Allotments: In-depth Interview Findings*. Report prepared by Westat, Inc. for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, June 2021. Project Officer: Rosemarie Downer. Both reports available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

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