

What is Food Insecurity?

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security is defined as “physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Food insecurity is “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited, or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

Food insecurity is categorized into four levels: High Food Security, Marginal Food Security, Low Food Security, and Very Low Food Security.

High Food Security: No problems or limitations related to food access or availability.

Marginal Food Security: Concern that food will run out before being able to afford more.

Low Food Security: Reduced quality, variety, or desirability of food intake. A household at this level is also classified as “food insecure.”

Very Low Food Security: Disrupted eating patterns resulting in reduced food intake. A household at this level is also classified as “food insecure.”

What does Food Insecurity Look Like?

Food insecurity can be experienced in a number of different ways, for example:

- Increased anxiety and stress about the cost of food.
- Eating a limited variety of foods. Consistently eating the same, few, low-cost foods and feeling like you need to compromise the types of food you eat to save money.
- Increased concern that your food supply may run out or run low before you have enough money to buy more.
- Eating less than you would like to or less frequently than you prefer to save food or money until you can get more.
- Skipping meals or whole days of eating because you have run out of food and do not have the money or resources to get more.
- Having to choose between buying food and buying books and other supplies for your college courses.
- Sometimes being comfortable having enough to eat and other times needing to ration food or skip meals to get by.

Are you Food Insecure?

It may be hard to recognize if a person needs food assistance. The Food Security Determination Survey** is intended to provide an idea of whether or not a person would be considered “food insecure” according to the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) criteria. “Food insecure” means someone may have reduced the quality, variety, or desirability of their food intake or may have disrupted eating patterns that result in a reduced intake of food due to lack of income or other resources for food.

To take the survey, read the questions and write down the points next to your answer.

In the last 6 months is the following statement often, sometimes, or never true for you: "*The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have the money to get more.*"

- Often True (1 point)
- Sometimes True (1 point)
- Never True (0 points)

In the last 6 months, is the following statement often, sometimes, or never true for you: "*I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.*"

- Often True (1 point)
- Sometimes True (1 point)
- Never True (0 points)

In the last 6 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes (1 point)
- No (0 points)

If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how often did this happen?

- Almost every month (1 points)
- Some months but not every month (1 points)
- Only 1 or 2 months (0 points)

In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes (1 points)
- No (0 points)

In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes (1 points)
- No (0 points)

To find your score, add up the total points. Compare your score to the categories below to determine your level of food security:

Score 0: High food security

Score 1: Marginal food security

Score 2-4: Low food security

Score 5-6: Very low food security

***U.S Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form created by the Economic Research Service of the USDA.*