

Multivitamin in SNAP: Setting the Record Straight

The House-passed version of the Farm Bill allows SNAP recipients to purchase a multivitamin with their benefits. It's a reform applauded by many leading nutrition scientists, health professionals, food banks and others as giving SNAP participants one more way to achieve better nutrition.

Government data (NHANES, et al.) clearly shows a high rate of nutrient deficiencies in low-income populations (that persist despite continuing efforts at education and improved access). And many studies and expert analysis demonstrate the benefit of a multivitamin to bridge nutrient gaps.

Opponents, in their efforts to “protect” SNAP, seem to ignore the program’s *actual* goal—providing nutrition assistance to recipients—and assert without basis that allowing a multivitamin in SNAP diverts critical funding from healthier food. That’s just not true.

- The Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program is about getting nutrition to those who need it most, and if a multivitamin can help, why not provide the option?
- Groups writing in opposition to the provision inaccurately imply that the provision would allow non-multivitamin supplements to be purchased. The provision is expressly limited to “multivitamins,” narrowly defined as a product containing at least 50 percent of essential nutrients, and at least 50 percent of the recommended daily value.
- SNAP benefits are too low—and we agree, but this deflects from the real issue: choice. The multivitamin provision does not require anyone to spend even a penny on a multivitamin. However, some groups that have opposed efforts to limit the food purchasing decisions by SNAP recipients, even for poor nutrition items are now arguing limit choice for a healthy low-cost option to improve nutrient intake.
- Some groups are arguing that that there is no conclusive evidence that a multivitamin improves “food insecurity,” but they sidestep the real question: can it contribute adequate nutrition to low-income Americans? SNAP is not just about filling empty bellies; poor nutrition has real health consequences! Well-documented research shows a multivitamin fills nutrient gaps—an advantageous option to combat nutrient deficiencies prevalent among SNAP-eligible Americans.
- Some groups are making the point that, the Dietary Guidelines take a “food first” approach to nutrition—and we agree. But the 2015 Dietary Guidelines also recognize nutrient needs of certain populations (folate for pregnant women, B vitamins for older

adults, calcium, and vitamin D for women, etc.) can be met with supplements when diet alone is not filling those requirements.

- There is no evidence to suggest that SNAP recipients would divert money from fruits and vegetables to a multivitamin. In fact, evidence indicates people who use a multivitamin are more likely to practice other healthy behaviors.

Bottom line: SNAP is about getting better nutrition to people who need it most. Multivitamins can play a role.

The House-passed version of the Farm Bill allows SNAP recipients to purchase a multivitamin with a small portion of their SNAP benefits (*less than a dime a day*) if they choose to.

Keep the multivitamin in the Farm Bill. Support equal opportunity for good health!