

# HEALTHY



# FOOD SC

HEALTHY CHOICE SC SNAP RETAILER OPERATIONAL HANDBOOK

Version 2.0

Current as of May 22, 2026

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# Overview

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Carolina is implementing changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that remove candy, energy drinks, soft drinks, and other sweetened beverages from eligible purchases. These updates are intended to encourage healthier food choices by limiting items high in sugar and low in nutritional value. SNAP-authorized retailers must comply with the new rules by updating point-of-sale systems and ensuring staff understand the revised eligibility criteria. Coordination with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and adherence to updated regulations will be necessary to maintain program integrity.

To support a smooth transition, retailers should work with their payment processors to update Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) settings, so restricted items are properly flagged at checkout. Retailers are encouraged to display clear signage and distribute informational materials to help customers understand the changes and reduce confusion.

Retailers should remain informed about compliance expectations and enforcement procedures to avoid disruptions in their SNAP participation. Regular audits will be conducted to ensure adherence to the new guidelines, and SCDSS will provide guidance and support throughout implementation. By proactively implementing these changes, retailers can help facilitate a smooth transition while continuing to serve SNAP recipients effectively. For additional information, tools, and compliance resources, visit the [Healthy Food SC](#) website.

## **Which Products Are No Longer SNAP-Eligible Items?**

Candy, energy drinks, soft drinks, and sweetened beverages will no longer be available for purchase with SNAP benefits in South Carolina.

### **Candy**

Items marketed as “candy” means a product that involves the preparation of sugar, honey, or other natural or artificial sweeteners in combination with chocolate, fruits, nuts, or other ingredients in the form of bars, drops, or pieces.

#### **“Candy” items typically are:**

- Individually wrapped, colorful, or sold in snack-sized bags.
- Located on the snack/candy aisle, by the checkout lane or in the seasonal/holiday section.
- The labels focus on flavor, fun, and eating directly.
- Ingredients include added flavors, colors, and is meant to be eaten as-is.
- Tend to be ready-to-eat bars, gummies, mints, hard candies.

#### **“Candy” labelling may include items such as:**

- Verbiage that focuses on flavor and enjoyment such as: “Milk Chocolate Bar”, “Chewy Caramels”, “Sour Gummies.”
- Serving sizes that often display verbiage such as “1 bar”, “3 pieces”, or “1 package.”
- Marketing language such as “fun size”, “snack size”, “treat”, or “share pack”.
- Pictures of the candy itself.
- Bright, colorful branding aimed at being eye catching and encouraging immediate consumption.

## **Retailer Checklist for Candy**

Assistance for identifying products that meet the definition of **Candy**.

### **Step 1: Identify Sugar or Artificial Sweeteners**

- Does the product contain sugar or artificial sweeteners as a primary ingredient?
  - If yes, go to Step 2.

### **Step 2: Check for Ingredient Combinations**

- Is the sugar/sweetener or candy item combined with one or more of the following?
  - Chocolate
  - Fruits
  - Nuts
  - Caramels
  - Gummies
  - Hard candies
- If yes, the product may be considered a candy. Please go to Step 3.

### **Step 3: Verify Form and Presentation**

- Does the product come in bars, drops, or pieces?
  - If yes, then the product is considered a candy.
  - Go to Step 4.

### **Step 4: Exclusions**

- Is the item a granola or protein bar?
  - If yes, then the product is **not** considered a candy.
- Is the item sold as a bakery or bread product?
  - If yes, then the product is **not** considered a candy.

### **Final Determination**

If a product contains sugar or artificial sweeteners, in combination with the ingredients referenced above, and is sold in the form of bars, drops, or pieces, it is classified as candy under this definition. This classification includes, but is not limited to, products customarily found in the candy section.

Candy **shall not include** the following:

- Protein bars.
- Granola bars.
- Baking ingredients such as sprinkles, chocolate melting wafers, toffee bits, or chocolate chips. Items primarily identified and sold as bakery or bread products, such as baked goods, cakes, crackers, cookies, muffins, brownies, pastries, bread, or similar products.

## Energy Drinks

"Energy drinks" means a beverage containing at least **sixty-five (65) milligrams of caffeine per eight (8) fluid ounces** that are **advertised as being specifically designed to provide metabolic stimulation or an increase to the consumer's mental or physical energy**. "Energy drinks" do not include ready to drink unsweetened or zero sugar coffee or tea based beverages.

**X** Nutrition Label for an *Ineligible Energy Drink*

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size	1 can
Amount per serving	
<b>Calories</b>	
	%DV
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 105mg	<b>4%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 29g	<b>10%</b>
Total Sugars 26g	
Includes 26g Added Sugars	<b>53%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 0g	
Niacin 100%	Vitamin B6 250%
Vitamin B12 80%	Pantothenic Acid 50%
Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, vitamin D, iron, and potassium	
<b>Caffeine Content: 80mg/8.4 fl oz.</b> ←	
<i>Not recommended for children, pregnant or nursing women and persons sensitive to caffeine.</i>	

## **Retailer Checklist for Energy Drinks**

Assistance for identifying products that meet the definition of *Energy Drinks*.

### **Step 1: Check Caffeine Content**

- Does the beverage contain at least 65 mg of caffeine per 8 fluid ounces?
  - If caffeine content is below 65 mg per 8 fluid ounces, the product does not meet the definition of an energy drink.

### **Step 2: Evaluate Advertising and Labeling**

- Is the beverage marketed as providing metabolic stimulation or increased mental/physical energy?
  - Check branding for terms like "boost," "energy," "performance," "amped," or "stimulant." If beverage marketing contains these terms, the product meets the definition of an energy drink.

### **Step 3: Exclusions**

- Is the product unsweetened or zero sugar coffee or tea based beverage and **not classified as an energy drink?**
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of an energy drink.

### **Final Determination**

If the beverage contains at least 65 mg of caffeine per 8 fluid ounces, is marketed as an energy-boosting product, and is not ***unsweetened or zero sugar*** coffee or tea based beverage, it qualifies as an energy drink under this definition.

Energy drinks **shall not include** coffee, tea, or any unsweetened or zero sugar substantially coffee or tea based beverage.

**Soft Drinks**

“Soft drinks” means any non-alcoholic beverage that is made with carbonated water and flavored, sweetened, or both, with more than five (5) grams of sugar or artificial sweeteners.

“Soft drinks” **does not include** carbonated water which is plain or naturally flavored or any beverage that is greater than 50 percent vegetable or fruit juice by volume, or that contains less than five grams of added sugar.

***Diet or Zero Sugar soft drinks remain an allowable purchase with SNAP benefits.***

For an example of an ineligible and eligible soft drink, please see the nutritional labels below.

 Nutrition Label for an **Ineligible Soft Drink** Item

 Nutrition Label for an **Eligible Soft Drink** Item

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>1 Bottle</b>
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>200</b>
% Daily Value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 95mg	<b>4%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 54g	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Sugars</b> 53g	
Includes 53g Sugars Added	<b>107%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Potassium</b> 150mg	<b>4%</b>
Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, fiber, Vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium.	

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>1 Bottle</b>
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>0</b>
% Daily Value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 50mg	<b>2%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Sugars</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
Includes 0g Sugars Added	<b>0%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Potassium</b> 150mg	<b>4%</b>
Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, total sugars, added sugars, Vitamin D, calcium, and iron.	

**Retailer Checklist for Soft Drinks**

Assistance for identifying products that meet the definition of **Soft Drinks**.

**Step 1: Confirm Carbonation**

- Is the beverage made with carbonated water? If yes, then go to Step 2.
  - If non-carbonated, the product does not meet the definition of soft drinks.

**INGREDIENTS**

**Carbonated water** High Fructose Corn Syrup, Citric Acid, Natural Flavors, Sodium Citrate, Sodium Benzoate(to protect taste).

**Step 2: Check for Sugar Content**

- Does the beverage contain more than 5g of sugar or artificial sweeteners?  
(see example of a nutritional label below)

Nutrition Facts	Amount/Serving	% Daily Value
	<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
About 6 servings per container <b>Serving Size</b> 12 fl oz (360mL)	<b>Sodium</b> 70mg	<b>3%</b>
	<b>Total Carb.</b> 39g	<b>14%</b>
	Total Sugars 38g	<b>77%</b>
	Includes 38g Added Sugars	
	<b>Protein</b> 0g	
<b>Calories</b> <b>Per serving</b> 140	Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium.	

**Final Determination**

If the beverage is carbonated, contains flavor, sweeteners, or both, **and** contains more than 5g of sugar/sweetener, it qualifies as soft drink under this definition.

**Diet or Zero Sugar soft drinks remain an allowable purchase with SNAP benefits.**

Soft drinks **shall not include:**

- A beverage that contains milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes.
- Any beverage consisting of 50% or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with no added caloric sweetener.
- Any product commonly referred to as "infant" or "baby" formula.
- Sports or rehydration beverages.
- Carbonated water beverages.
- Any beverage for medical use meaning any beverage suitable for human consumption and manufactured for use as a source of necessary nutrition due to a medical condition or for use as an oral rehydration electrolyte solution for infants and children formulated to prevent or treat dehydration due to illness.

**Sweetened Beverages**

“Sweetened Beverages” means any sweetened beverages, flavored or sweetened or both, with **added sugars**, ready for consumption without further processing.

 Nutrition Label for an **Ineligible Sweetened Beverage**

Nutrition Facts	
8 serving per container	
<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>8 FL OZ(240mL) 1Cup</b>
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>110</b>
% Daily Value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 10mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 28g	<b>10%</b>
<b>Total Sugars</b> 25g	
Includes <b>23g Added Sugars</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Vitamin C</b> 90mg	<b>100%</b>
Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, Vitamin D, calcium, iron, and potassium.	

 Nutrition Label for an **Eligible Sweetened Beverage**

Nutrition Facts	
8 serving per container	
<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>8 FL OZ (240mL) 1 Cup</b>
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>100</b>
% Daily Value	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 20mg	<b>2%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 29g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Sugars</b> 23g	<b>0%</b>
Includes <b>0g Added Sugars</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Protein</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
<b>Iron</b> 0.5mg 2%	<b>Potassium</b> 230mg 4%
<b>Vitamin C</b> 90mg	<b>100%</b>
Not a significant source of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, dietary fiber, Vitamin D, and calcium.	

## **Retailer Checklist for Sweetened Beverages**

Assistance for identifying products that meet the definition of **Sweetened Beverages**.

### **Step 1: Check for Sweeteners**

- Does the beverage contain added sugars?
  - If the beverage is unsweetened or has zero sugar, the product **does not** meet the definition of sweetened beverage.

### **Step 2: Exclusions**

- Is the product plain or naturally flavored carbonated water?
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of sweetened beverages.
- Does the beverage contain milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes?
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of sweetened beverages.
- Does the beverage contain **50%** or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with **no added sugar**?
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of sweetened beverages.
- Is the product commonly referred to as “infant” or “baby” formula?
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of sweetened beverages.
- Is the product a sports or rehydration beverage?
  - If yes, it does not meet the definition of sweetened beverages.

### **Final Determination**

If the beverage is sweetened, flavored or both **and** contains **no added sugar** it qualifies as a sweetened beverage under this definition.

### **Sweetened beverages shall not include:**

- A beverage that contains milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes.
- Any beverage consisting of **50%** or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with **no added sugars**.
- Any product commonly referred to as "infant" or "baby" formula.
- Sports or rehydration beverages.
- Carbonated water beverages.
- Any beverage for medical use meaning any beverage suitable for human consumption and manufactured for use as a source of necessary nutrition due to a medical condition or for use as an oral rehydration electrolyte solution for infants and children formulated to prevent or treat dehydration due to illness.

## SNAP Product Matrix: Candy



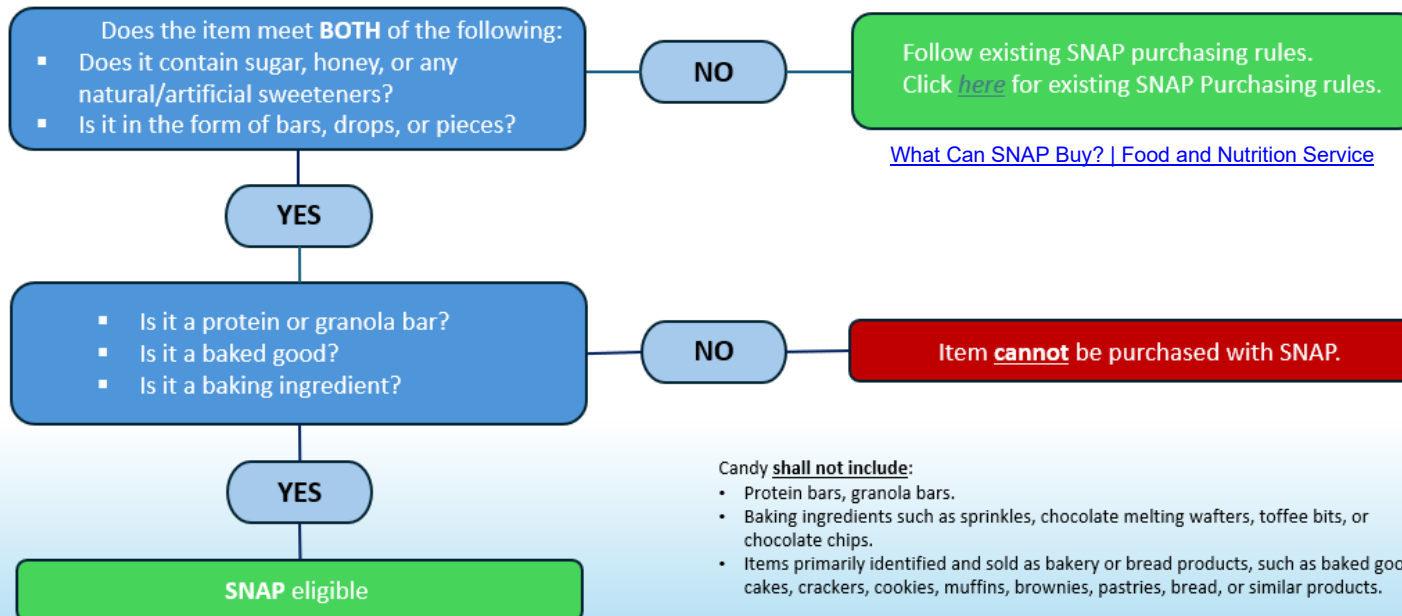
### SNAP Product Matrix

A guide for SNAP Customers and Retailers.

Can an item be purchased with SNAP benefits in South Carolina?

### Candy

**Starting August 31, 2026, certain food items will no longer be eligible for purchase with SNAP. Use the steps below to determine if an item is eligible for SNAP purchases in South Carolina.**



Candy **shall not include**:

- Protein bars, granola bars.
- Baking ingredients such as sprinkles, chocolate melting wafers, toffee bits, or chocolate chips.
- Items primarily identified and sold as bakery or bread products, such as baked goods, cakes, crackers, cookies, muffins, brownies, pastries, bread, or similar products.



For additional information, please visit the [Healthy Food SC website](#) or scan the QR code.

## SNAP Product Matrix: Soft drinks

### SNAP Product Matrix

A guide for SNAP Customers and Retailers

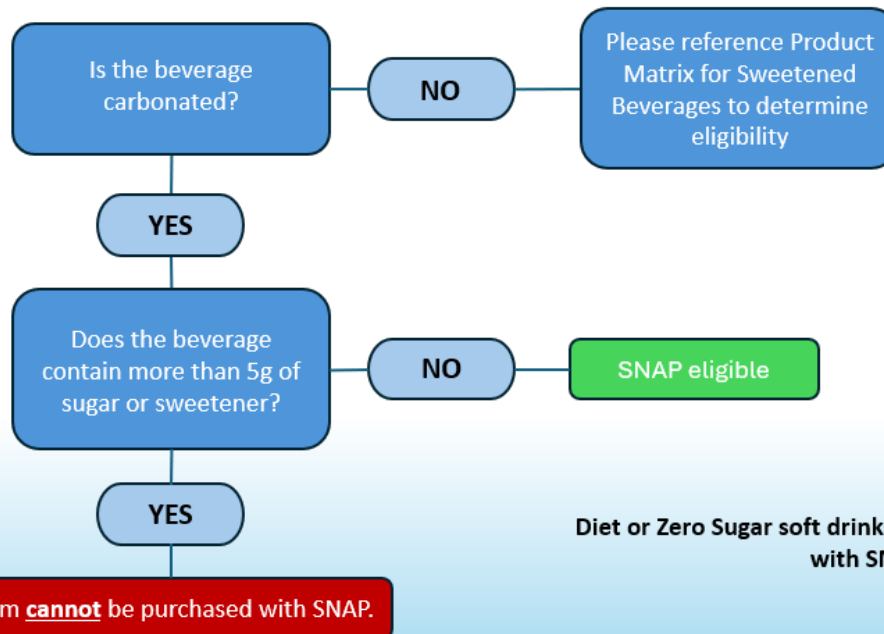
Can an item be purchased with SNAP benefits in South Carolina?

### Soft drinks

Diet or Zero Sugar soft drinks remain an allowable purchase with SNAP benefits.

Starting **August 31, 2026**, certain food items will no longer be eligible for purchase with SNAP.

Use the steps below to determine if an item is eligible for SNAP purchases in South Carolina.



Sweetened beverages **shall not include:**

- A beverage that contains milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes.
- Any beverage consisting of 50% or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with no added caloric sweetener.
- Any product commonly referred to as "infant" or "baby" formula.
- Sports or rehydration beverages.
- Carbonated water beverages.
- Any beverage for medical use meaning any beverage suitable for human consumption and manufactured for use as a source of necessary nutrition due to a medical condition or for use as an oral rehydration electrolyte solution for infants and children formulated to prevent or treat dehydration due to illness.

Diet or Zero Sugar soft drinks remain an **ALLOWABLE purchase** with SNAP benefits



For additional information, please visit the *Healthy Food SC* website or scan the QR code.

## SNAP Product Matrix: Energy drinks

### SNAP Product Matrix

A guide for SNAP Customers and Retailers.

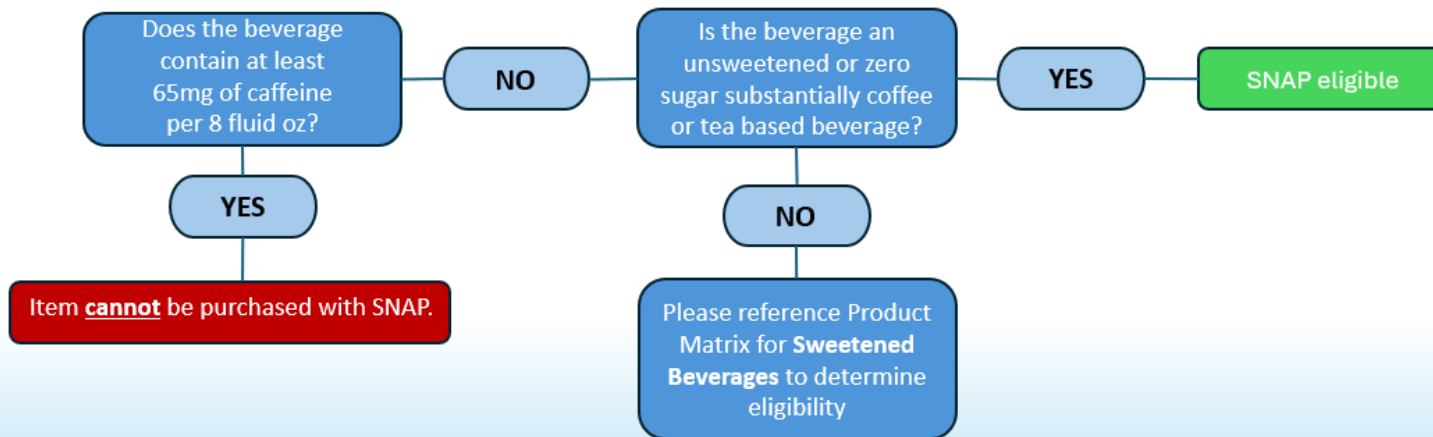
Can an item be purchased with SNAP benefits in South Carolina?

### Energy drinks

*Products advertised as being specifically designed to provide metabolic stimulation or increase mental or physical energy.*



**Starting August 31, 2026, certain food items will no longer be eligible for purchase with SNAP. Use the steps below to determine if an item is eligible for SNAP purchases in South Carolina.**



For additional information, please visit the *Healthy Food SC* website or scan the QR code.

## SNAP Product Matrix: Sweetened Beverages

### SNAP Product Matrix

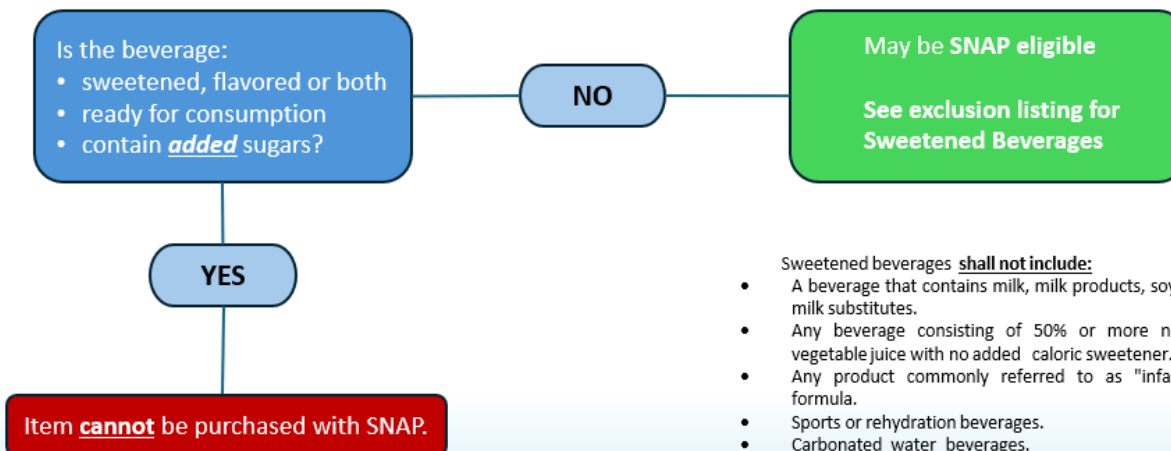
A guide for SNAP Customers and Retailers.

Can an item be purchased with SNAP benefits in South Carolina?

### Sweetened Beverages



*Starting August 31, 2026, certain food items will no longer be eligible for purchase with SNAP. Use the steps below to determine if an item is eligible for SNAP purchases in South Carolina.*



- Sweetened beverages **shall not include:**
- A beverage that contains milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes.
  - Any beverage consisting of 50% or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with no added caloric sweetener.
  - Any product commonly referred to as "infant" or "baby" formula.
  - Sports or rehydration beverages.
  - Carbonated water beverages.
  - Any beverage for medical use meaning any beverage suitable for human consumption and manufactured for use as a source of necessary nutrition due to a medical condition or for use as an oral rehydration electrolyte solution for infants and children formulated to prevent or treat dehydration due to illness.



For additional information, please visit the *Healthy Food SC* website or scan the QR code.

## **Retailer Frequently Asked Questions:**

1. **What is *Healthy Food SC*?**

**Healthy Food SC** is South Carolina's Healthy Food Choice(HFC) demonstration project dedicated to improving the health and well-being of families who rely of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

2. **When does the *Healthy Food SC* project begin?**

As defined in [South Carolina's Executive Order 2025-30](#), all South Carolina SNAP-authorized retailers will begin restricting newly defined prohibited items effective August 31, 2026.

3. **What food items will be restricted under the *Healthy Food SC* project?**

Beginning August 31, 2026, South Carolina will restrict candy, energy drinks, soft drinks, and sweetened beverages from the definition of eligible foods that may be purchased with SNAP benefits.

The description of these restricted food items is as follows:

**Candy:** a preparation of sugar, honey, or other natural or artificial sweeteners in combination with chocolate, fruits, nuts, or other ingredients in the form of bars, drops, or pieces.

"Candy" shall not include the following:

- Protein bars, granola bars.
- Baking ingredients such as sprinkles, chocolate melting wafers, toffee bits, or chocolate chips.
- Items primarily identified and sold as bakery or bread products, such as baked goods, cakes, crackers, cookies, muffins, brownies, pastries, bread, or similar products.

**Energy Drinks:** beverages containing at least sixty-five (65) milligrams of caffeine per eight (8) fluid ounces that are advertised as being specifically designed to provide metabolic stimulation or an increase to the consumer's mental or physical energy. "Energy drinks" shall not include coffee or tea or any substantially coffee- or tea-based beverage.

**Soft Drinks:** any nonalcoholic beverage made with carbonated water and flavored or sweetened, or both, with more than five (5) grams of sugar or other natural or artificial sweeteners.

***Diet and zero sugar soft drinks will remain an allowable purchase with SNAP benefits.***

**Sweetened Beverages:** any sweetened beverage, flavored or sweetened or both, with **added sugar** or other natural or artificial sweeteners, ready for consumption without further processing.

"Soft Drinks" and "Sweetened Beverages" shall not include:

- A beverage that contains milk, milk products, soy, rice, or other milk substitutes.
- Any beverage consisting of 50% or more natural fruit or vegetable juice with no added sugars.
- Any product commonly referred to as "infant" or "baby" formula.
- Sports or rehydration beverages.

- Carbonated water beverages.
- Any beverage for medical use meaning any beverage suitable for human consumption and manufactured for use as a source of necessary nutrition due to a medical condition or for use as an oral rehydration electrolyte solution for infants and children formulated to prevent or treat dehydration due to illness.

**4. Are there any changes to food and non-food items that were previously prohibited for purchase with SNAP benefits?**

All items previously identified as prohibited, including food and non-food products, continue to be ineligible for purchase with SNAP benefits. For additional information on what items can/cannot be purchased with SNAP benefits, please visit the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition website [What Can SNAP Buy?](#)

**5. Do all SNAP recipients have to participate in the *Healthy Food SC* project?**

Yes, all South Carolina SNAP households will participate in the *Healthy Food SC* demonstration project.

**6. Will all SNAP retailers have to restrict the newly prohibited items?**

Yes, all retailers authorized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to accept SNAP benefits in South Carolina must comply with the State's *Healthy Food SC* project for all SNAP transactions.

**7. What if my store is unable to implement these changes?**

All authorized SNAP retailers must implement these changes. In advance of South Carolina's *Healthy Food SC* implementation date, August 31, 2026, USDA FNS will issue notification to SNAP authorized retailers required to comply with these changes. The notification will explain that compliance with the *Healthy Food SC* restrictions is required to effectuate the purpose of SNAP and maintain authorization as a SNAP retailer. The notification will also explain that retailers found to be non-compliant will be subject to Involuntary Withdrawal for failure to effectuate the purpose of SNAP.

For additional information regarding Retailer Compliance with *Healthy Food SC* project, please visit USDA FNS [Retailer Compliance website](#).

**8. How will these changes impact online retailers?**

When an online SNAP order is packed in a walk-in store, the retailer must follow the SNAP food rules for the state where that store is located. For example, if the store is in South Carolina, the retailer must apply South Carolina's SNAP food restrictions.

When an order is packed in a warehouse that customers **cannot enter**—whether the customer chooses delivery or pickup—the retailer must follow the SNAP food rules for the state that issued the customer's EBT card. If the customer's EBT card was issued in South Carolina, the retailer must apply South Carolina's SNAP food restrictions. The retailer determines the customer's state of issuance using the Bank Identification Number (BIN) on the EBT card.

The USDA provides additional guidance on SNAP food restriction projects and retailer compliance on their [Retailer Compliance website](#).

**9. Will the South Carolina Department of Social Services(DSS) inform SNAP recipients about these changes or are retailers expected to relay the updates?**

The Department will communicate these changes to SNAP recipients through various communication channels. As a USDA-approved SNAP retailer, you play a key role in helping make these changes successful by communicating with your customers. DSS has provided a ***Healthy Food SC SNAP Retailer Toolkit*** with downloadable asset designs to support the transition to the ***Healthy Food SC*** project. These materials will assist retailers clearly identify eligible items, ensuring accurate transactions and a seamless experience for SNAP participants.

**10. Will there be any adjustments to SNAP allotments received as a result of the Health Food SC demonstration project?**

No, the State of South Carolina cannot modify benefit allotments or eligibility parameters for the SNAP program.

**11. Will the food restrictions apply to out of state SNAP recipients purchasing food in South Carolina?**

Yes, all SNAP recipients purchasing food items with their SNAP benefits, in the State of South Carolina, will be subject to the newly defined restricted food items.

**12. How should an authorized SNAP Retailer update their point-of-sale systems?**

Authorized SNAP retailers will need to consult their POS system manual or support resources for detailed instructions to ensure system changes are implemented by August 31, 2026.

**13. How can I submit feedback regarding the Healthy Food SC project?**

Any feedback regarding the ***Healthy Food SC*** project may be submitted via email ([SCHealthyFoodChoiceProject@dss.sc.gov](mailto:SCHealthyFoodChoiceProject@dss.sc.gov)) to the South Carolina Department of Social Services.