

# SENIOR NUTRITION AND HEALTHY AGING IN MASON COUNTY

By Susan Evans, Mason County Senior Services

According to the US Dietary Guidelines for Americans, “Older adults generally have lower calorie needs but similar or even increased nutrient needs compared to younger adults.” This means that adults aged 60 and over should focus on nutrient-dense foods yet fewer calories in order to maintain the same weight.

“Maintaining a healthy diet rich in plant-based foods, with low to moderate intake of healthy animal-based foods and lower intake of ultra-processed foods, was linked to a higher likelihood of healthy aging—defined as reaching age 70 free of major chronic diseases and with cognitive, physical, and mental health maintained, according to a new study by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, University of Copenhagen, and University of Montreal” (Harvard University, 2025). The study analyzed the diets of over 100,000 individuals over thirty years and concluded that the individuals whose diets consisted of more “fruits, vegetables, whole grains, unsaturated fats, nuts, and legumes... with low to moderate intake of healthy animal-based foods such as fish and certain dairy products... [and low intake of] ultra-processed foods” were linked with higher cognitive, physical, and mental health.

Here in Mason County, there are many valuable nutritional resources for older adults but those in need may not know about them. Based on the results of the 2025 Mason County Senior Services Needs Assessment, 8% of older adults, or an estimated nearly 700 older adults, need help paying for food. The Assessment also indicates 52% of older adults are not familiar with available

resources, so please share this information with others who may be interested:

The **Community Foundation for Mason County** in partnership with District Health Department #10 and West Michigan Community Mental Health is finalizing a list of food resources in Mason County which will be available soon.

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**FiveCAP Inc** provides The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Programs (CSFP) to those who meet income qualifications. Call 231-757-3785 to learn more. The next TEFAP distribution is scheduled for Thursday, June 4, 2026, and the next CSFP distribution is scheduled for Wednesday, June 10, 2026.

Upcoming **Feeding West Michigan** mobile food pantry dates in Mason County are Tuesday, May 5, 2026, and Tuesday, June 2, 2026, both at 11:00 a.m. (drive-thru) at Crossroads Church, 1463 E. US 10, Scottville, MI 49454. Call 616-784-3250 for more information.

**Flashfood** is a free mobile app that “connects shoppers with discounted, high-quality groceries nearing their best-by date to reduce food waste, offering items like meat, produce, and dairy at up to 50% off or more. Users browse deals, pay in-app, and pick up items” from local stores including Meijer and Family Fare in Ludington.

The **Free Soil Area Senior Center** offers Senior Congregate Meals on Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon. Call 231-464-6789 for more information.

**Lakeshore Food Club** ([www.lakeshorefoodclub.org](http://www.lakeshorefoodclub.org)) is a



nonprofit grocery store for low-income families. Call 231-480-4334 for more information.

**Local food pantries** throughout Mason County provide food and have varying days, hours, items, and requirements. Most are listed on the Feeding America West Michigan website at [www.feedwm.org](http://www.feedwm.org) or at United Way's website [www.mi211.org](http://www.mi211.org) and include Caritas Food Pantry at St Mary's Catholic Church in Custer at 231-690-9642, Cornerstone Baptist Church Food Pantry at 231-845-1285, and Salvation Army Ludington at 231-843-3711. Many neighborhoods throughout the county offer mini self-serve "Care Box" sites where anyone can give or receive food. Some churches occasionally offer free hot meals as well.

**MiCAFE (Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly)** is a program to help adults age 60+ navigate the application process for **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)**. Call 877-664-2233 for more information. Alternatively, contact MDHHS directly at 844-464-3447 to learn more about applying for SNAP.

**Senior Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meals** through Mason County Central Schools serves Mason County adults aged 60+ with home-delivered Meals on Wheels for homebound seniors as well as Congregate Meals for seniors at the Ludington Area Senior Center, Scottville Area Senior Center, and Tallman Lake Senior Center. Call Senior Meals at 231-757-4831 to learn more and contact each senior center directly to sign up for a congregate meal. Donations are appreciated but are never expected.

**Senior Project Fresh** ([www.michigan.gov/SeniorProjectFresh](http://www.michigan.gov/SeniorProjectFresh)) is offered by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services from May 1 until October 31. The program provides Mason County residents aged 60 or older with free nutrition education and \$25 in benefits that can be exchanged for fresh fruits, vegetables, and honey sold at local farmers' markets and roadside stands.

Income requirements apply and applicants must be aged 60 or older or aged 55 and older and belong to a Michigan federally recognized tribe or urban tribal group. There are two ways to apply: download and use the mobile app called "Healthy Together" or go to <https://app.healthytogether.co/> on a web browser. Currently the only participating markets in Mason County are Orchard Market in Free Soil and The Roadside on Pere Marquette Highway. To apply as a new market or stand, email inquiries to [MDHHS-SeniorProjectFresh@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-SeniorProjectFresh@michigan.gov).

Those who are eligible for SNAP may qualify to join **Walmart+ Assist** for a discounted rate (\$6.47/mo right now) which provides free nearby delivery from stores with a \$35 minimum purchase and free shipping on order with no minimum purchase as well as discounts on gas. Apply at [www.walmart.com/plus/assist](http://www.walmart.com/plus/assist).

**Mason County Senior Services Errands Program** matches volunteers with older adults who need food or medication picked up and delivered to them. Call 231-316-6523 for more information or to become a volunteer.

The new **Mason County Senior Discount Directory** will be published soon ([www.masoncountymi.gov](http://www.masoncountymi.gov)). Any restaurant or food-related business in Mason County offering a senior discount can email [sevans@masoncountymi.gov](mailto:sevans@masoncountymi.gov) to be included.

If you or someone you know has questions about resources for seniors, please email Susan Evans at [sevans@masoncountymi.gov](mailto:sevans@masoncountymi.gov) or call 231-316-6523. Seniors who need help finding programs and services can also contact the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) at 888-456-5664 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Another helpful resource is the **Active for Life** publication for seniors which is available at senior centers, at various locations throughout the community, and online at [www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com](http://www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com).