

The Special Diet Allowance: What You Should Know

On November 30, 2010, the Ontario government announced they had decided to keep the Special Diet program instead of cancelling it. But, they said, they were going to make some changes to the program. This backgrounder explains these changes and says what you should know if you currently get a Special Diet allowance.

Three big changes are being made starting April 1, 2011

1. The amount of money people get will change. **See page 3 for the new list and amounts.**
 - For some medical conditions, the amount of money is going up a lot. Some examples are: If you have hypertension, your allowance will go from \$10 a month to \$86. If you have diabetes, it will go from \$42 a month to \$81. For obesity, it goes from \$20 to \$51.
 - For other medical conditions, the amount of money is going down. For example, if you have a child between 2 and 8 years old with lactose intolerance, your allowance will go from \$97 to \$30. If you are over 19 and have celiac disease, it will go from \$131 to \$97.
 - Some medical conditions are grouped together because the diets used to treat them are very similar – for example, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. People with one of these conditions will get the amount for that condition. People with more than one of these conditions will not get the total of all the amounts, but only one amount – the highest of the amounts for the conditions they have. So, for example, if you have both diabetes and hypertension, you'll get \$86, which is the amount for hypertension. (Diabetes is \$81.)
2. The list of medical conditions is changing.
 - Some new conditions are being added to the list, including congestive heart failure and cirrhosis, and other conditions are being expanded, such as chronic wounds and burns.
 - Some of the conditions on the current list are not on the new list. This means some people will lose their Special Diet Allowance. For example, liver failure is not on the new list. People with liver failure will lose the \$10 for that condition.
 - Some conditions that are not on the new list might be covered under a different condition. For example, the person with liver failure might qualify for the amount for cirrhosis, if they have weight loss or body wasting.
3. There will be new administrative rules.
 - Everyone has to fill out a new application form. This will be hard for some people who don't have good access to a health care provider, who have trouble getting around, or who don't have good medical records.
 - Everyone has to give permission for program officials to get extra information about your medical condition. This is common in some programs, but it's new for Special Diet. You will only have to give information about the medical condition that makes you eligible for Special Diet. For example, if you get Special Diet for diabetes but you also have depression, you won't have to give permission for them to get information about your depression – only your diabetes.

What you should think about before you reapply

If you already get Special Diet, you should have received a letter from the government explaining the changes, as well as the new application form.

You do not have to submit the new application form right away. Some people will be better off waiting until the July 31 deadline. So before you get the new application form filled out by your health care provider (doctor, registered nurse – extended, nurse practitioner, registered dietician), here are some things that you should think about:

- The current Special Diet program will end as of July 31.
- The new Special Diet program will be available as of April 1. This means that the new amounts of money based on the new list of conditions (see page 3) can start being paid then.
- Between April 1 and July 31, you will continue to get your current Special Diet amount until you send in the new application form and the government finds you eligible under the new program.
- As soon as you send in the new form and are found eligible, the amount of your allowance will be recalculated. The amount of money you will get will be based on the medical conditions your health care provider checks off on the form, using the new amounts (see the list on page 3).
- If your new application results in more money and you get the form in before the July 31 deadline, you will get a retroactive payment for any increase back to April 1.
- If your new application results in less money, the lower amount will start to be paid as of the month you sent in your new application form. But the Ministry will not go back to April 1 to take money back.
- If you don't send in the new application form by July 31, your special diet allowance will end.

The most important thing is to figure out whether you will get **more money or less money** under the new rules.

- If you will get more money, you may want to send in the new application form right away so you can start getting the increased allowance as of April 1.
- If you will get less money, you may want to wait – but remember, your new application form must be in by July 31.
- If you are not sure whether you will get more or less money, you may want to wait to send in your application form until nearer the July 31 deadline. If it turns out that you are eligible for more money, you will get the increase retroactive to April 1 – but only if you apply before July 31.

Get some advice to help you figure what to do:

- Take the new application form to your health care provider and talk to them about which medical conditions you can qualify for;
- Use the chart on page 3 to figure out how much money you might be eligible for;
- Talk to your local legal clinic about the best strategy for you. (Contact info on page 4.)

- If you get only a very small amount of money from ODSP or OW because you have other income (e.g., CPP or earnings), you will need to figure out whether changes to your special diet allowance could affect your eligibility for ODSP/OW. Talk to your legal clinic and your ODSP/OW caseworker as soon as you can, if you think that might be a problem for you.

The new list of conditions and the new amounts

The government has based the new list of conditions and the new amounts on recommendations made in a 2008 report from their Special Diets Expert Review Committee.

The Committee's recommendations get rid of some of the unfairly low amounts for conditions like hypertension and diabetes. But there are still some problems with the Committee's recommendations that are being challenged at the Human Rights Tribunal and the Social Benefits Tribunal.

Medical Condition	Amount	Medical Condition	Amount
Unintended weight loss / body wasting due to one of more of these medical conditions: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Crohn's Disease HIV / AIDS Lupus Malignancy Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Ostomies Pancreatic Insufficiency Short Bowel Syndrome Congestive Heart Failure Cirrhosis (stage 3 and 4) Anorexia Nervosa Cystic Fibrosis Ulcerative Colitis		Food Allergy – Milk / Dairy	
		2-8 years of age	\$32
		9-18 years of age	\$63
		19-50 years of age	\$32
		Over 50 years of age	\$47
Lost between 5% and 10% of usual body weight Lost more than 10% of usual body weight	\$191 \$242	Lactose Intolerance	
		2-8 years of age	\$30
		9-18 years of age	\$59
		19-50 years of age	\$30
		Over 50 years of age	\$45
		Note: If a person has both of these conditions, they will get the amount for Food Allergy – Milk / Dairy	
		Dysphagia requiring thickening fluids	\$125
		Osteoporosis	\$38
Chronic Wounds and Burns		Renal Failure	
Stage 1 & 2	\$88	Pre-dialysis	\$52
Stage 3 & 4	\$191	Peritoneal / Hemodialysis	\$88
Diabetes	\$81	Food Allergy – Wheat	\$97
Gestational Diabetes	\$102	Celiac Disease	\$97
Extreme Obesity	\$51	Note: If a person has both of these conditions, they will get one allowance of \$97	
Hypertension	\$86		
Hyperlipidemia	\$51		
Hypercholesterolemia	\$51		
Note: If a person has 2 or more of these conditions, they will get one allowance – whichever amount is the highest for the conditions they have		Insufficient lactation to sustain breast-feeding or breast-feeding contraindicated (provided until infant reaches 1 year)	\$154

Note that the total amount that anyone can receive under the new list is still \$250.

For more information, check these websites:

How to find and contact your local community legal clinic:

- www.legalaid.on.ca/en/contact/contact.asp?type=cl

Ministry of Community and Social Services website information about special diet changes:

- www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/special_diet_change.aspx

For ODSP recipients:

- You can call 1-855-390-1642 toll free for the ODSP Special Diet Unit that is handling all the new applications

PDF copy of the Special Diets Expert Review Committee report:

- www.accesson.ca/documents/en/mcass/social/publications/special_diet_en.pdf

ISAC's backgrounder on Why the Program is Changing:

- Look under "What's New" at www.incomesecurity.org

ISAC's Social Assistance Review website:

- www.sareview.ca

ISAC will provide updates as more information is available.

Visit our website at www.incomesecurity.org.