

How often can I come?

Here at the Personal Essentials Pantry, our rule is that you can come as often as you need to, as many times as you need to. *However*, that does *not* mean that you can ask for every product every time you come. The products we carry are distributed on the basis of *product function and lifespan*: that is, on how long a given product should last your particular household.

We've set things up this way so that when we're out of a product, you don't have to wait some artificially determined length of time before you can come back again. We want to give you the maximum flexibility to get what you need.

What happens if you're out of a product I need when I come?

Basically, you try us again the next time you're able to visit us – the next Thursday or the next Sunday. Your shopping list will have all of the products that your household is eligible for that you have *not* already gotten within the defined product lifespan.

Why does my list change every time I come?

It sometimes seems that every product on our shelves has a different usable lifespan; and that's even before we get into how the lifespan changes with family size. Rather than restricting you to visits only X number of days, we decided to let you visit as often as you needed to in order to get the products you need – but to control distribution by product lifespan.

Your shopping list is calculated by the PEPbase software that we use:

- What products your household needs as defined by who's in your household: how many adult males/females, how many teenage males/females, how many youth, how many infants;
- *Minus* any products that your household has received within the defined lifespan of those products
- *Minus* any products that we don't have on our shelves that day.

The shopping list for every visit you make here is recalculated at the time of that visit, based on previous shopping trips.

Why isn't [___] on my list?

Basically, you won't see a product if (a) you received it within the defined product lifespan, or (b) your family isn't eligible for the product. Since we're working with only about one-fifth the funding we really need to meet this need area, we have to be sure that we distribute things as fairly as possible – and so we rely on the definition of how long a product should last a family of your size. And unfortunately, we don't have a magic wand to suddenly put a product onto our shelves because somebody really needs it; we just can't make things appear out of thin air.

How come my neighbor got [___] and I didn't?

Your neighbor may have visited us more recently, or have a larger family; or they may have been two or three orders behind you the last time you visited, and we ran out of whatever they got this time before their order was filled last time. Your order is based on *your* household and *your* shopping history, and what we have on the shelves when we get to your order.

Can I swap [___] for two of [___]?

Unfortunately, we can't make swaps of this fashion. All of our products are distributed on the basis of normal, predictable product use; swapping one of *this* for two of *that* may mean that we'll have one of *this* available for another family – but we now have one less of *that* available. And usually we can't swap *this* for *that* functionally.

How did you define the product lifespans?

These were defined on the basis of actual household use. The Pantry's first Coordinator spent about nine months dating every product she used in her home with her family of two, and finding out how long that product lasted her. We take those numbers as our "baseline" numbers for a household of 1 or 2, and then adjust for larger households, decreasing by a few days (usually 3 or 5) for every additional two people.

But I really *need* [___]...

Unfortunately, we can't change the laws of nature. If we don't have a product in stock, we have no way of giving it to you. We wish that there was a way we could wave a magic

wand and tell reality that you really *need* dish soap or laundry detergent and have it miraculously appear on the shelf – but we haven't been able to find a magic wand that works in here.

If you want to avoid a potentially wasted trip, give us a call at 772-3146 and ask about our supplies before you come. We can't reserve any product for you – that is, we can't put it aside until you get here – but we can at least tell you whether we've got lots and lots of the product you need, or whether we're scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Where do you get the products?

We have to buy a lot of what we put on the shelf. While we can get some products through "pipeline" agencies like Second Harvest, there aren't a lot of channels for "gleaning" products that would otherwise be going to the landfill, as there is with food. We get some products donated, but even then the products are usually purchased by the person donating them. To meet our typical weekly demand, we need to purchase (at wholesale prices) about \$800. We'll keep working to improve our funding, but we face budget problems, too.

Frequently Asked Questions



Personal Essentials Pantry

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...and all the other things you've been wondering about and haven't had a chance to ask.