

2012

What is the cost of
healthy food?

Why does it matter?

Who can't afford
healthy food?

Why can't people
afford healthy food?

What can individuals
and communities do?

The Real Cost of Eating Well in Huron County



What is the cost of healthy food?

Every year, the Huron County Health Unit surveys the price of food items from grocery stores across the county. Using this data and a survey tool called the Nutritious Food Basket, we calculate the cost of one week's worth of groceries.

In 2012, the cost of groceries for a family of four was \$184.02. To arrive at this cost, we priced 67 food items in six area grocery stores, calculating the average lowest retail price. The items included meet recommendations from Canada's Food Guide. The assumption is that people have the time, skill, and equipment needed to cook low-cost staples. The survey does not include prepared convenience foods or household non-food items.

The weekly cost of groceries for a family of four is now \$184.02. That's an increase of five per cent in three years.

Why does the cost of food matter?

We know that when money is tight, people are forced to cut into their food budget to pay for other living expenses. They skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk, and fill up on non-nutritious foods because they are cheap. The result of this unhealthy diet is an increased risk of chronic illness, and poor growth and development in children.

Why can't people afford healthy food?

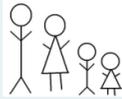
For people living on minimum wage, Ontario Works, or the Ontario Disability Support Program, it's hard to make ends meet. After paying rent, they still have to pay for other necessities such as:

- Heat and hydro
- Transportation, car maintenance and gas
- Child care
- Phone
- Clothing
- Eye and dental care
- Home maintenance
- Costs for children in school
- Household cleaners and personal hygiene products

This means that little money is left for buying nutritious food. Too often, it's so little that people go hungry.

When income is low and living expenses are high, people don't have enough money for food. Last year in Huron County, 18 000 people were served by food banks. Of these, 4 100 were children.

Consider these real-life situations for people living in Huron County:

	Households with Children				Single Person Households		
	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Scenario 6	Scenario 7
	 Ontario Works	 Minimum Wage Earner	 Median Ontario Income	 Ontario Works	 Ontario Works	 ODSP	 Senior OAS/GIS
Income							
Total Monthly Income (After Tax)	\$2,032	\$2,639	\$6,360	\$1,855	\$642	\$1,115	\$1,326
Expenses							
Monthly Rent (Apartments 1-3 BR; with utilities)	\$972	\$972	\$972	\$972	\$677	\$677	\$677
Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	\$797	\$797	\$797	\$605	\$265	\$265	\$196
Monthly Income Remaining for Other Expenses							
	\$263	\$870	\$4,591	\$278	-\$300	\$173	\$453
<p>A single male living on Ontario Works could spend his entire income on the rent for a one bedroom apartment. There would be no money left for food or other expenses.</p> <p>The situation is not much better for a family of four on Ontario Works. After paying for rent and food, they have only \$263 left to cover all other expenses.</p>							
% Income Required for Rent	48%	37%	15%	52%	106%	61%	51%
% Income Required for Nutritious Food	39%	30%	13%	33%	41%	24%	15%

What can we do?

All people in Huron County should have access to a nutritious, adequate diet. And each of us has a role to play to ensure it. Start by educating yourself about what causes hunger and poverty, then get involved:

Advocate for:

- Improved social assistance and minimum wage
- More affordable housing policies
- Accessible and affordable child care

Volunteer to help others:

- Share your gardening skills or donate growing space to local groups.
- Start a community kitchen in your neighbourhood.
- Donate time, food, or money to support our local emergency food programs.
- Think about where your food comes from and buy local products.

Income is one of the best predictors of health. When people are short of money, they're more likely to have poor health, such as depression and disease, and babies with low birth weights.

Both individuals and communities must deal with the impact. That's why we all need to focus on eliminating poverty.



For more details about the Nutritious Food Basket contact the Huron County Health Unit.

www.huronhealthunit.com

519-482-3416

Here On Food blog.
Check out what our public health dietitian has to say at www.hereonfood.ca