

2013

What is the cost of healthy food?

Why does the cost of food matter?

What is left after rent and food costs?

Why can't people afford healthy food?

What can be done?

The Real Cost of Eating Well in Middlesex-London



What is the cost of healthy food?

Every year, the Middlesex-London Health Unit surveys the price of food items from grocery stores across Middlesex-London. Using this data and a survey tool called the Nutritious Food Basket, staff estimate grocery costs.

In 2013, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four was \$181.64. To arrive at this cost, volunteers priced 67 food items in 12 area grocery stores, calculating the average lowest price. The items included meet recommendations from *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. However, the food items require 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.

In May 2013, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four was \$181.64. This is a \$3.34 or 1.9% increase from the estimated cost in May 2012.



Why does the cost of food matter?

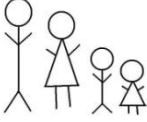
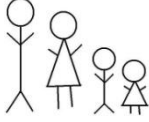
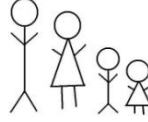
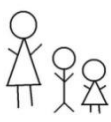



When money is tight, people are forced to cut into their food budget to pay for other living expenses. They skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk and fill up on non-nutritious foods that cost less.

Food security is necessary for good health.

- A poor diet increases the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as low birth weight.
- Inadequate nutrition also affects the immune system.
- Children living in low income households are more likely to get sick and less able to do well in school.

In 2012, an average 10,911 London individuals and households received assistance from Ontario Works each month, including 6,690 children under the age of 18.

What is left after rent and food costs?

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	 Medium Ontario Income	 Ontario Works	 Ontario Works	 Ontario Disability Support Program	 Older Adult Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Security
Income							
Total Monthly Income (Including Benefits & Credits)	\$2112	\$2711	\$6852	\$1927	\$688	\$1167	\$1499
Expenses							
Estimated Monthly Rent	\$1082	\$1082	\$1082	\$920	\$582	\$743	\$743
Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	\$786.50	\$786.50	\$786.50	\$566.32	\$220.18	\$220.18	\$160.82
Monthly Income Remaining for Other Expenses*							
	\$243.50	\$842.50	\$4983.50	\$440.68	-\$114.18	\$203.82	\$595.18
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>The situation is not good for a family of four on Ontario Works. After paying for rent and food, they have only \$243.50 left to cover all other expenses.</p> </div>				<div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>The situation is even worse for a single man living on Ontario Works. He would spend almost his entire income on the rent for a one bedroom apartment. He would not have enough money left to pay for food and other expenses.</p> </div>			
% Income Required for Rent	51%	40%	16%	48%	85%	64%	50%
% Income Required for Nutritious Food	37%	29%	11%	29%	32%	19%	11%

* People still need funds for utilities, phone, transportation, cleaning supplies, personal care items, clothing, gifts, entertainment, internet, school supplies, medical and dental costs, and other costs.

Why can't people afford healthy food?

For people living on minimum wage, Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, it is 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 care, dental care and medications
- Home maintenance
- Costs for children in school
- Household cleaners and personal hygiene products

This means that little money is left to buy nutritious foods. Too often, it's so little that people buy cheaper less nutritious foods or even go hungry.

What can be done?

All Middlesex-London residents should have access to a nutritious, adequate and culturally acceptable diet. Everyone has a role to play. Learn about what causes hunger and poverty (see "For more information"), and then get involved:

Use social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to spread the word about those struggling to get by in Middlesex-London.

Write a letter to a local politician to advocate for:

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

Volunteer to help others:

- Share gardening skills or donate growing space to local groups
- Start a community kitchen
- Donate time, food or money to support the London Food Bank

Support local farmers and merchants by buying local products.

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

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

When income is low and living expenses are high, people don't have enough money for food. Last year, 41,921 visits were made to the London Food Bank. Of these, 35% were children.

For more information:

25 in 5: Network for
Poverty Reduction
www.25in5.ca

FoodNet Ontario
www.foodnetontario.ca

London Food Bank
www.londonfoodbank.ca

Middlesex-London
Health Unit
www.healthunit.com/cost-of-healthy-eating

Adapted with permission from the Huron County Health Unit.