

The Real Cost of Eating Well in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties 2016

Food is a basic human right.
Everyone has the right to access enough safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in a way that is socially acceptable and dignified. This is known as food security.

WHAT IS THE COST OF HEALTHY FOOD?

Every May, dietitians from Hastings Prince Edward Public Health find the lowest price for 67 basic food items at eight grocery stores across both counties. These items make up what is called the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). The items included meet recommendations from Canada's Food Guide and do not include prepared foods or household non-food items such as toilet paper. We use this data to calculate the cost of one week's worth of healthy groceries for 22 different age and gender groups, and a standard family of four. In 2016, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four in Hastings and Prince Edward (H&PE) counties was \$204.89.

Income is one of the best predictors of health. We know that when money is tight, healthy food is one of the first things to be cut in order to pay rent and other bills. In order to save money, people may skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk, and fill-up on high-calorie low-nutrient foods because they are cheap. The result of this unhealthy diet is an increased risk of chronic disease and poor growth and development in children. This affects everyone. In comparison to food-secure households, annual health care costs are 23% higher in households with marginal food insecurity and 121% higher in households with severe food insecurity in Ontario.

A family of four must now spend **\$1,397** more this year than they did for the same groceries in 2011.



NFB

is a survey tool that measures the cost of basic healthy eating locally. It represents both healthy eating patterns and food purchasing patterns of Canadians. Boards of Health are required to monitor food affordability through use of the Nutritious Food Basket Protocol in the Ontario Public Health Standards. This information is then used for planning and advocacy by public health units.

FOODS WITH THE LARGEST PRICE INCREASES FROM 2011–2016



EGGS

13%



PEANUT BUTTER

14%



FROZEN FISH

23%



LETTUCE

40%



APPLES

41%

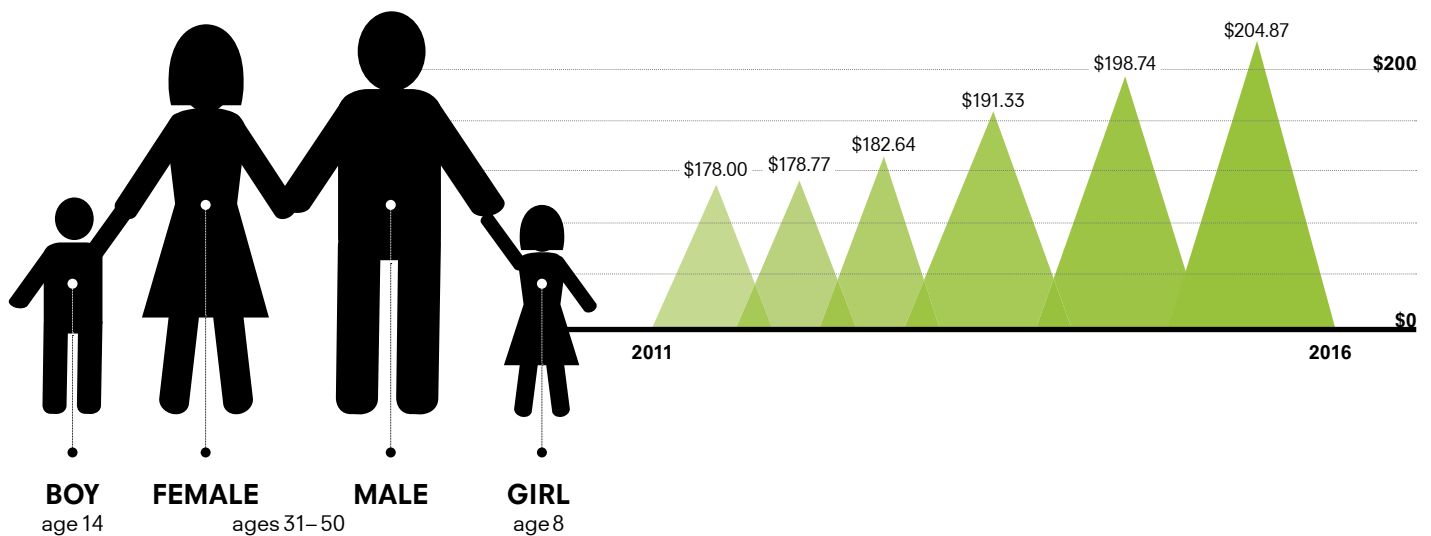


GROUND BEEF

47%

Estimated average weekly cost of the NFB for a family of four living in H&PE Counties.

FAMILY OF FOUR



Note: Year-to-year comparisons of NFB data must be approached cautiously. The store selection process strongly influences the comparison of yearly data.

WHO CAN'T AFFORD HEALTHY FOOD?

Hunger, food insecurity, and poverty can happen to anyone. In 2014, the majority of food insecure households in Ontario relied on wages or salaries from employment as their main source of income. Even when working, factors like part-time employment, lack of benefits, and lack of job security can make it hard for people to afford healthy food.

At the same time, the majority of households relying on social assistance as their main source of income experienced food insecurity.

Household food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints.

Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.

	Total monthly income (after tax)	Monthly rent (may or may not include utilities)	Food costs (Nutritious Food Basket)	Monthly income remaining for other expenses
Households with Children				
Ontario Works (2 parents and 2 children)	\$2,227	\$1,136	\$887	\$204
Minimum Wage Earner (2 parents and 2 children)	\$2,940	\$1,136	\$887	\$917
Average Income (2 parents and 2 children)	\$7,448	\$1,136	\$887	\$5,425
Ontario Works (1 parent and 2 children)	\$2,016	\$949	\$670	\$397
Single Person Households				
Ontario Works (1 man)	\$768	\$700	\$299	-\$231
ODSP (1 man)	\$1,206	\$865	\$299	\$42
Senior OAS/GIS (1 woman)	\$1,563	\$865	\$216	\$482

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. When looking at the table above, keep in mind that after paying rent they would still have many other essential expenses such as:



WHAT CAN WE DO?

Targeted and sustainable solutions are needed to address the underlying problem of inadequate income. Charitable food programs alone are not a long-term solution for household food insecurity and the majority of food insecure households will not use them.

Actions that support policy change and improve the social safety net can include:

- The investigation of a basic income guarantee
- Basic minimum employment standards to reduce precarious employment
- Improved social assistance rates and the adoption of a living wage
- Affordable housing and accessible public transportation
- Accessible and affordable child care
- A national food policy

WHAT

CAN WE DO? (CONTINUED)



Learn

- Learn about the root causes of food insecurity and its impact on health
- Join and participate in a local food security or poverty reduction network



Support

- Buy local products from local farmers and vendors
- Share your gardening skills or donate growing space to local groups
- Start a community kitchen in your neighbourhood
- Volunteer at a Food For Learning Student Nutrition Program
- Donate time, food or money to support local food initiatives that increase access to healthy food such as the good food box, community gardens, community food centres, and meal programs



Advocate

- Write to your local, provincial, and federal government about equitable wages, social assistance rates, annual guaranteed income and affordable housing
- Advocate for a national food policy that ensures equal access to safe and nutritious food for all Canadians

RESOURCES

For more information about poverty and food insecurity, check out:

PROOF, Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity — www.proof.utoronto.ca

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health: Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity — www.osnpnh.on.ca/news/membership/news/osnpnh-releases-position-statement-on-responses-to-food-insecurity

Dietitians of Canada: Position Statement on Household Food Insecurity — www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx

Poverty Round Table — www.povertyroundtablehpe.ca

Fresh For All — www.freshforall.ca

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy — www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/realizing-our-potential-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition — www.ohcc-ccsc.ca/en/tags/community-food-security

Food Secure Canada — www.foodsecurecanada.org

Food Banks Canada — www.foodbankscanada.ca

Nutritious Food Basket Protocol — www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/nutritious_food_basket.pdf

For more details about the Nutritious Food Basket, or to borrow the Meal or No Meal resources, contact:

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health

E-mail: foodsecurity@hpeph.ca

Call: 613-966-5500

Toll-free: 1-800-267-2803

TTY: 711 or 1-800-267-6511

www.hpepublichealth.ca

Public Health is committed to providing accessible programs and services to all. To request this or any other publication in an alternative format, please contact 613-966-5500 or by email at accessibility@hpeph.ca.

Sources: Please contact Hastings Prince Edward Public Health for a detailed list of references.