

The Real Cost of Eating Well in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties 2015

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 2015, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four in Hastings and Prince Edward (H&PE) counties was \$198.74.

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 diseases 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.

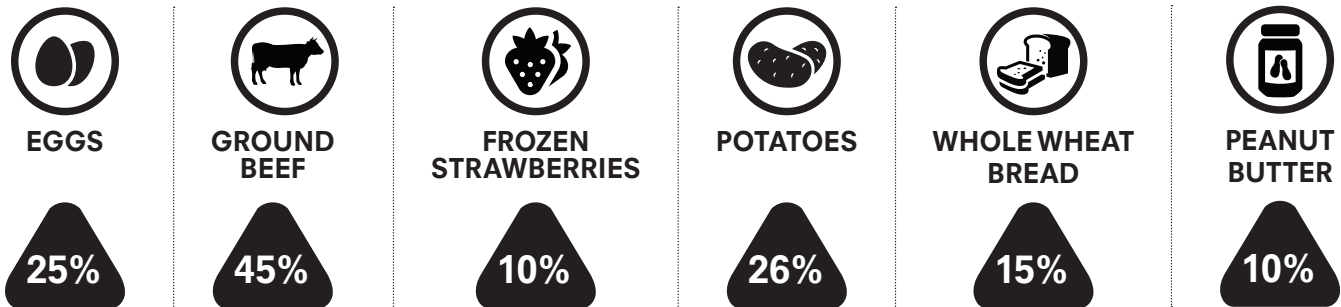
A family of four must now spend \$1,785 more this year than they did for the same groceries in 2010.

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.

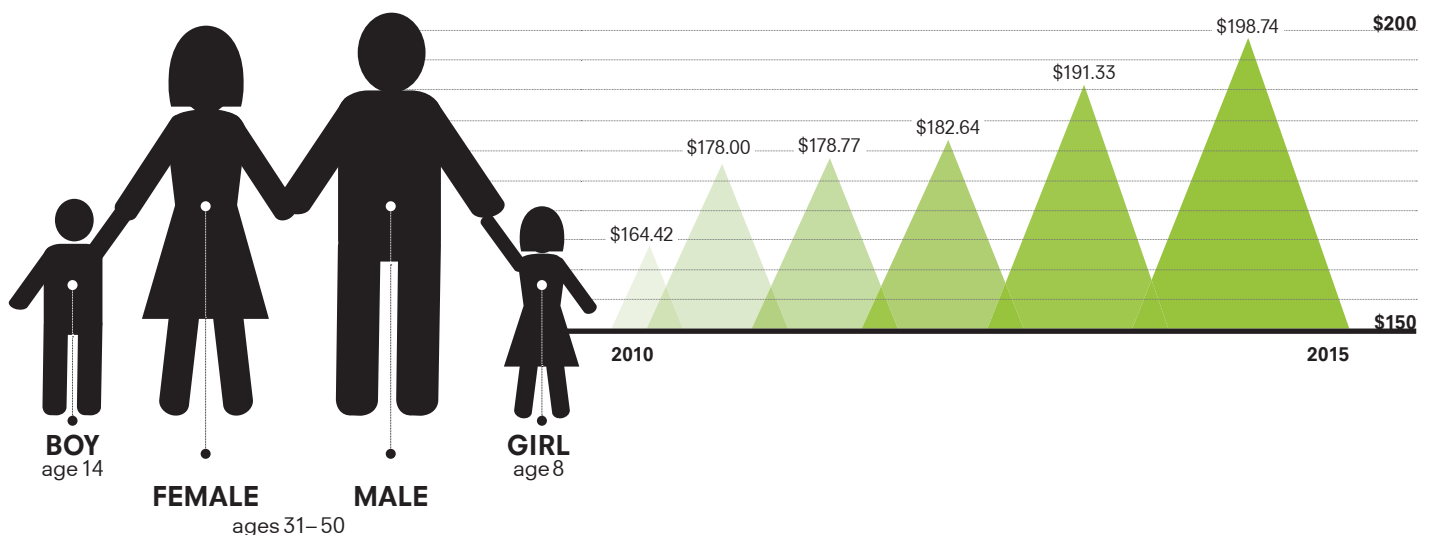


INCREASE IN PRICE BY ITEM FROM 2010–2015



Estimated average weekly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) for a family of four living in H&PEC

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 2012, over half of the 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.

	Total monthly income (after tax)	Monthly rent (apartments including utilities)	Food costs (Nutritious Food Basket)	Monthly income remaining for other expenses
Households with Children				
Ontario Works (2 parents and 2 children)	\$2,196	\$1,337	\$861	-\$2
Minimum Wage Earner (2 parents and 2 children)	\$2,882	\$1,337	\$861	\$684
Median H&PEC Income (2 parents and 2 children)	\$4,990	\$1,337	\$861	\$2,427
Ontario Works (1 parent and 2 children)	\$1,988	\$921	\$650	\$417
Single Person Households				
Ontario Works (1 man)	\$740	\$700	\$289	-\$249
ODSP (1 man)	\$1,193	\$786	\$289	\$118
Senior OAS/GIS (1 woman)	\$1,544	\$786	\$210	\$548

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:



Child care



Clothing



Home furnishings



Household cleaners



Personal hygiene products



Telephone



Eye and dental care



School supplies and fees



Transportation (car payments, maintenance, gas and bus pass)

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Advocate for:

- Improved social assistance and minimum wage rates
- The adoption of a living wage in H&PEC
- Affordable housing and accessible public transportation
- Accessible and affordable child care
- A national food policy

YOU CAN VOLUNTEER

- 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 emergency food programs
- Support local farmers by choosing locally grown and produced foods
- Join a local food security or poverty reduction network

HASTINGS PRINCE EDWARD PUBLIC HEALTH TAKES ACTION:

In 2015, HPEPH held four forums using an activity called Meal or No Meal that was created by the Food Security Network. This interactive activity shares the information from the NFB and provides participants with a greater understanding of the financial struggles facing many families in H&PE. 80 people from various sectors ranging from municipal government to students and community groups participated in these forums which resulted in increased awareness of poverty and food insecurity and action to combat these issues.

RESOURCES

For more information about poverty and hunger, check out:

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: 613-966-3036

www.hpepublichealth.ca

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