

Is healthy food expensive?



To determine if healthy foods are more expensive than less healthy foods, the Economic Research Service (ERS) completed a study estimating the cost of 4,439 foods using three different methods: 1) price per calorie, 2) price per edible weight, and 3) price per average portion size. Their conclusion was that the cost of a food depends on the way value is assigned to a food.

The first method, price per calorie, shows that healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, are more expensive than “less healthy” foods, or “moderation foods,” (those that are high in saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium, or that contribute little to meeting dietary recommendations), as defined by the study. However, while healthy foods may not be the least expensive way to buy calories, a healthy diet is more than just calories; nutrients also have an important role in a healthy diet. The second method, price per edible weight and the third method, price per average portion size, determine the value of a food in a different way, by accounting for the amount of the food purchased and eaten. When using these two methods,

healthy foods are actually less expensive than most meats and foods high in saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium.

The researchers determined that it costs less to meet the food group recommendations of MyPlate for most grains, dairy, and fruit than for most vegetables or protein foods when the value is measured by price per edible weight or by average portion size. They found that grains were always the least expensive foods and certain foods, like pinto beans, consistently ranked as less expensive.

When purchasing foods, it is important to consider the nutrients in the food as well as the calories. This study demonstrates that healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and some protein foods like beans, are inexpensive for consumers when the price per edible weight and price per portion are considered. In this way, healthy foods are actually not expensive compared with unhealthy foods.

The researchers of the study suggest that consumers should think

about the health benefit or “cost” of the food and not just the dollar value: “Cheap food that provides few nutrients may actually be ‘expensive’ for the consumer from a nutrition economy perspective, whereas food with a higher retail price that provides large amount of nutrients may actually be quite cheap.”

Remember to still be a value conscious shopper; buy in-season and monitor prices for the foods you most commonly purchase.

Sources: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib96.aspx#Uopi59Lkue4>; All Photos: www.pixabay.com

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Food Safety:

Keep your holiday guests safe

Entertaining guests can be enjoyable, but don't forget about following food safety guidelines. Protect against foodborne illness at your next entertaining event by practicing proper food safety:

- 1 Clean:**
 - Scrub hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before food preparation and after handling food.
 - Wash food preparation surfaces and utensils after preparing food, especially if they came into contact with raw food.
 - Rinse fruits and vegetables under running water and remove surface dirt with a produce brush.
 - Avoid rinsing raw meat and poultry before preparation to prevent spreading bacteria around the sink and surrounding areas.
- 2 Separate:**
 - Keep raw food, like eggs and meat, separate from food that will not be cooked, and from utensils that will not be used for raw food.
 - Use a separate cutting board for raw products only.
 - Do not place cooked or ready-to-eat food, like cottage cheese, on an unwashed plate that held raw food or the juice from raw food.
 - Change utensils to prevent double-dipping.
- 3 Cook:**
 - Cook food to correct temperatures; use a thermometer to check the temperature. To check turkey temperature, insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh, wing, and breast. It is safe when all areas reach a minimum internal temperature of 165°F.
 - If you have cooked ahead and are reheating for guests, reheat sauces, soups, or gravies to a rolling boil and other foods to 165°F. Keep hot foods hot when serving.
 - Avoid eating uncooked cookie dough and traditional, homemade eggnog because they may contain raw eggs. Also avoid unpasteurized apple cider, as it may contain harmful bacteria.
- 4 Chill:**
 - Do not let food, such as dips and cooked food, sit out for longer than two hours. Set out smaller quantities for guests and replenish more often. Serve refrigerated dips on ice.
 - Thaw frozen food by placing it in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave, NOT at room temperature. Cook food thawed under water or in the microwave immediately. Be especially careful with frozen turkeys, which require about four to five days to thaw in the refrigerator.
 - When in doubt about the safety of a food, throw it out.
 - Do not overcrowd the refrigerator; this will reduce its ability to circulate cold air. Plan ahead so that you will be sure to have enough space.
 - When cooking large quantities, cool immediately by dividing into shallow containers for appropriate cooling in the refrigerator. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Below are tips on how to make favorite holiday dishes healthier without missing out on the flavor!

<p>Sweet Potato Casserole This delightful dish can quickly become a dessert rather than a side dish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce the large amount of sugar that is often used in sweet potato recipes, replace the sugar with a small amount of honey (minimum 1 Tablespoon to maximum 1/3 cup) or sugar-free sweetener. <p>Topping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top with pecans or oats rather than marshmallows 
<p>Mashed Potatoes This homemade classic is often high in fat and calories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use low-fat or fat-free milk (or evaporated milk) instead of cream Replace butter with low-sodium chicken broth
<p>Green Bean Casserole Rather than using high-sodium canned products, impress your guests by making this favorite from scratch!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make your own cream of mushroom soup Use frozen green beans instead of canned <p>Topping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top with almonds instead of French-fried onions 
<p>Tamales This traditional dish can contain a variety of fillings, but a main ingredient is often lard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try using canola oil for some, or all, of the lard Try substituting Greek yogurt or ricotta cheese for partial amounts, or in place of, lard
<p>Pumpkin Pie Commonplace in holiday kitchens, this sweet treat can be modified without sacrificing flavor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use whole wheat crust Choose pure pumpkin instead of pumpkin pie filling Use low-fat or fat-free milk (or evaporated milk), rather than sweetened condensed milk or heavy cream
<p>Macaroni and Cheese This family-friendly dish is a perfect opportunity to incorporate vegetables--and reduce fat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add cauliflower, broccoli, greens, or other vegetables to the dish before baking Use whole wheat pasta Choose low-fat dairy 

Basic Tamales

Ingredients

- 1 bag corn husks
- 1 1/4 cup canola oil
- 4 cups hot broth, chicken or beef
- 1 Tablespoon baking powder
- 7 cups instant corn masa mix

*Salt and pepper to taste

*Choose your favorite holiday filling

Directions

1. Soak corn husks in hot water for 30 minutes. Drain and place in bowl.
2. Combine broth, oil, and baking powder with masa mix in electric mixer bowl. Mix for 2 to 3 minutes to thicken; add salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.
3. Combine filling ingredients in bowl. Set aside.
4. Assembly: Spread 2 to 3 Tablespoons masa on smooth side of corn husk. Place 1 to 2 Tablespoons of filling along the masa center and roll tamale like a jelly roll. Fold tail over and place tamale tail-side down on a sheet pan. Refrigerate or freeze raw tamales in zipper bags until ready to steam.
5. Steaming tamales: Place 2 inches of water in steamer pot. Place tamales (folded tails down) in basket. Don't overcrowd tamales. Cover, bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and cook for 2 hours or until corn shuck pulls away from masa.

Healthy, Easy Green Bean Casserole

Ingredients

- 2, 8-ounce packages of mushrooms, chopped
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon canola oil
- 3 Tablespoons flour
- 1/2 cup vegetable broth
- 1 cup low-fat milk (can use UHT milk)
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2, 12-ounce packages of frozen green beans
- 1 cup almonds, divided

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Place mushrooms, onion, and canola oil in medium saucepan on medium heat; saute about 5-7 minutes.
3. Stir in flour and evenly coat the vegetables.
4. Add vegetable broth, milk, pepper, and garlic powder. Heat to boiling, stirring regularly. Once boiling, simmer for 10-12 minutes, or until thickened to a gravy-like consistency. Continue to stir regularly.
5. Stir green beans and 1/2 cup almonds into the saucepan.
6. Pour green bean mixture into a 9x9 casserole dish and bake for 30-35 minutes.
7. Meanwhile, toast 1/2 cup almonds in a pan on the stove on low heat for about 5 minutes. Top casserole with toasted almonds.



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IN THE NEWS

SNAP-Ed continues to help low-income families

SNAP-Ed is the educational component of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The purpose of SNAP-Ed is to reduce hunger in the United States and help those who receive SNAP learn how to stretch their food dollars to buy and prepare healthy foods, benefiting the entire family.

In Indiana, SNAP-Ed is administered through the Indiana Family Nutrition Program (FNP) of Purdue Extension. Based on a recent report analyzing surveys from participants in the Indiana FNP program over the past year, there was an increase in nutrition knowledge in the areas of MyPlate, grains, reading labels, fruits and vegetables, dairy, protein foods, preparing a meal, fats, menu planning, and other categories, such as food safety, budgeting, and physical activity.

National data on SNAP-Ed is also positive. According to a national study conducted by the Public Health Institute, "40% of SNAP-Ed participants said that SNAP-Ed helped them reduce the number of days their families faced food insecurity during the month." SNAP-Ed is active in all 50 states and free to those who receive SNAP.

By participating in SNAP-Ed, clients have the opportunity to learn how to stretch their food dollars, choose healthy foods, and better utilize the foods that they receive from emergency food providers. Call your local Purdue Extension office today to find out how your clients can participate in the FNP program!

Sources: Purdue Extension; <http://www.phi.org/resources/?resource=snapedworks>

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