

The Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto - 2005

The Nutritious Food Basket

The Nutritious Food Basket is Ontario's standardized food costing tool that measures the cost of healthy eating based on recommendations set by *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (1992)* and *Nutrition Recommendations (1990)*.

The Nutritious Food Basket is a list of foods that can be priced to estimate the average cost of feeding 23 different age/sex groups (refer to Table 2).

The selection of foods included in the Nutritious Food Basket is based on the nutrient value. The foods are among those frequently purchased. The food items are chosen according to the **lowest available price** in each of the grocery stores.

Understanding the Food Basket

- It assumes the shopper is economical; generally the basket does not include processed foods, snack foods and restaurant/take-out foods
- It assumes most people have the necessary time, food skills and equipment to be able to prepare most meals from scratch
- It assumes a person has access to quality grocery stores

- It excludes non-food items such as laundry detergent, soap and paper products

Results

- Average weekly cost for a family of four is \$124.62 per week (\$539.60 per month), an increase of 3.03% in food costs from 2004
- Since 1999, the cumulative increase in food costs is 16.7%

Implications of Findings

- Rising food costs can be a significant hardship for Toronto residents who are on low and/or fixed incomes
- The 3% increase in social assistance rates in 2004 does not overcome the 21.6% cut in social assistance rates in 1995
- Minimum wage rates have increased only 8.7% over 10 years; food costs have increased 16.7% since the Nutritious Food Basket was established in 1999
- The shelter component of social assistance rates does not reflect market rental accommodations in Toronto
- Rising fuel costs contribute to increased food costs because transportation costs factor into all levels of the food production and distribution system



**Monthly Household Budget for Three Household Types Supported By
Ontario Works Benefits and Living in Market Rental Accommodations**

	One Person Household (male, aged 25-49)¹	Single-Parent Household (female, aged 25-49, boy age 10 and girl age 3)²	Reference Family of four (male and female age 37, boy age 13, girl age 8)³
Monthly Income (Data from Toronto Social Services)			
Basic Allowance	\$201.00	\$548.00	\$631.00
Shelter Allowance	\$335.00	\$571.00	\$621.00
Winter Clothing Allowance ⁴	\$0.00	\$42.00	\$42.00
Canada Child Tax Benefit ⁵	\$0.00	\$513.82	\$473.32
Federal GST Benefit ⁶	\$18.92	\$57.83	\$57.83
Total	\$554.92	\$1,732.65	\$1,825.15
Some Monthly Expenses			
Food ⁷	\$190.57	\$332.62	\$539.60
Average Monthly Rent ⁸ (assuming rent includes heat, electricity)	\$730.00 (Bachelor)	\$1,061.00 (2 Bdr.)	\$1,258.00 (3 Bdr.)
Telephone	\$26.37	\$26.37	\$26.37
Total	\$946.94	\$1,419.99	\$1,823.97
Monthly Funds Remaining (for other basic needs, e.g., transit/transportation, child care, clothing, school supplies, household and personal items)	- \$392.02/month	+ \$312.66/month	+ \$1.18/month

¹No income other than OWA. Only basic and shelter allowances factored into estimated OWA net income for calculation of GST credit. Net annual income = 12 months x \$536.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances = \$6,432.00.

²No income other than OWA and CCTB. Only basic and shelter allowances factored into estimated OWA net income for calculation of CCTB, GST credit. Net annual income = 12 months x (\$1119.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances - \$268.66 NCBS + \$513.82 CCTB) = \$16 369.92.

³No income other than OWA and CCTB. Only basic and shelter allowances factored into estimated OWA net income for calculation of CCTB, GST credit. Net annual income = 12 months x (\$1252.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances - \$268.66 NCBS + \$473.32 CCTB) = \$17 479.92.

⁴Based on \$105.00/dependent child spread over 5 months.

⁵Based on net annual incomes as described in notes 2 & 3

⁶Based on net annual incomes described in notes 1-3. GST issued on a quarterly basis. Amount showing is quarterly amount divided by 3.

⁷Based on Nutritious Food Basket 2005

⁸Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2004

The monthly shelter allowance in Ontario Works Benefits does not reflect the high cost of market rental accommodations in Toronto. That is why many low and/or fixed income residents have to choose between paying the rent or buying food.

Table #1: Weekly Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto (May, 2005)

How is the Nutritious Food Basket Calculated?

The cost of the Nutritious Food Basket is based on the 66 food items collected from 12 stores across the City. The software program automatically adds 5% to the basket cost to cover the cost of miscellaneous foods used in meal preparation, e.g., spices, seasonings, condiments, baking supplies, coffee/tea.

How to Calculate the Food Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket

Follow the steps below to find out the cost of a weekly nutritious food basket.

STEP 1:

Write down the age and sex of all the people you are feeding. For example:

Man, 37 years old and Woman, 37 years old

Boy, 13 years old and Girl, 8 years old

STEP 2:

Using Table #1, write down the cost of feeding each person.

STEP 3:

This is your subtotal.

STEP 4:

It costs a little more to feed a small group of people and less to feed a large group. Use the following adjustments for household size:

- 1 person - multiply by 1.15
- 2 people - multiply by 1.10
- 3 people - multiply by 1.05
- 4 people - make no change
- 5 people - multiply by 0.95
- 6+ people - multiply by 0.90

STEP 5:

To determine the cost per month, multiply by 4.33

Age/Sex Group	Cost Per Week
Child 1	14.43
2-3	15.26
4-6	20.07
Boy 7-9	24.14
10-12	30.15
13-15	35.37
16-18	41.55
Girl 7-9	23.22
10-12	27.65
13-15	29.59
16-18	28.32
Man 19-24	39.43
25-49	38.27
50-74	34.68
75+	31.47
Women 19-24	29.02
25-49	27.75
50-74	27.27
75+	26.58

Pregnancy	Cost Per Week
Age 13-15	
Trimester 1	32.67
Trimesters 2,3	34.51
Lactation	35.46
Age 16-18	
Trimester 1	32.83
Trimesters 2,3	35.20
Lactation	36.10
Age 19-24	
Trimester 1	31.93
Trimesters 2,3	34.07
Lactation	34.86
Age 25-49	
Trimester 1	30.63
Trimesters 2,3	32.47
Lactation	33.12

Sex	Age (years)	Cost Per Week (\$)	Example
Man	37	38.27	
Woman	37	27.75	
Boy	13	35.37	
Girl	8	23.22	
Subtotal		\$124.62	
TOTAL		\$124.62 x no adjustment = \$124.62 x 4.33 = \$539.60/month	

Table #2 Example: Reference Family of 4, Toronto (May, 2005)

Sex	Age (years)	Cost Per Week (\$)	Your Household
Subtotal			
TOTAL			

Community Food Security

Community Food Security has four main dimensions:

- It is a strategy for ensuring secure access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious culturally appropriate food for everyone, produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity;
- It features co-operation among all contributors in a local/regional food system, including growers and producers, citizen groups, community agencies, governmental organizations, businesses, academic researchers and environmental advocates;
- It is based on values entrusted in the Ottawa Charter of Health Promotion;
- It addresses economic, environmental and social aspects of the food system, and thus promotes adequate incomes for consumers and producers (OPHA Food Security Workgroup, 2002)

In March 2001, Toronto adopted the Toronto Food Charter, which commits the City to strive to ensure that all Toronto residents enjoy the right to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.

Strategies for Advocacy Utilizing the Nutritious Food Basket Results

- Acts as an effective tool, by an individual, family or group, to raise awareness about the cost of healthy eating
- Helps to compare the cost of healthy eating to other basic living expenses such as housing, transportation, clothing, child care
- Acts as a gauge in estimating year to year changes in food costs in programs such as Student Nutrition programs, day cares, shelters, etc.
- Provides data that can be used to advocate for food policy development and support around access and equity issues such as social assistance and minimum wage



