



The Cost of Eating Well in Renfrew County and District – 2015

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB)

Each year Renfrew County and District Health Unit conducts the Nutritious Food Basket Survey (NFB), as mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This survey measures the cost of basic healthy eating, based on Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide and eating behaviours from the Canadian Community Health Survey results.

To compile the survey, 67 food items (a one-week supply of basic nutritious foods) are priced at the lowest cost available. Eight different stores from across Renfrew County and District were surveyed. The costing information is entered into a spreadsheet, which calculates the average cost of a week's worth of nutritious groceries based on age, gender and stage of life.

Generally, the NFB survey does not include highly processed foods or non-food items such as shampoo, toilet paper and dish soap. It does not include eating out or buying extras to enjoy a special meal with additional friends or family. The survey assumes:

- Most people have the necessary time, food skills and equipment to prepare meals from scratch
- People have access to quality food stores and means of transportation to comparison shop

How to use the Nutritious Food Basket information

Food cost information can be used in a variety of ways to:

- ❑ Compare the cost of healthy eating against income and other basic living expenses (Table 1)
- ❑ Determine the cost of healthy eating for individuals or households. To figure out the cost of a basic healthy diet for you and your family, refer to 'Weekly Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Renfrew County and District' (Table 2)
- ❑ Estimate the cost of feeding a group of people, e.g., group homes, shelters or students
- ❑ Develop case studies for discussion in education programs

Highlights from the 2015 Nutritious Food Basket survey

The cost of feeding a family of four in Renfrew County and District was \$201.54 a week (\$872.67 a month). The results of the survey show that for many low income households in our district it can be a struggle to pay rent, pay bills, and buy enough nutritious food for themselves and their families.

How do we know some people don't have enough money for food?

A summary of some real life situations for people living in Renfrew County and District appears in Table 1. These scenarios show that after paying for shelter and food, households on fixed incomes and minimum wage earners have little, if any money left over to cover other basic monthly expenses. For example, a family of four with one parent earning full-time minimum wage would have to spend sixty three per cent of their income on food and rent alone.



Table 1: Monthly Income and Cost of Living Scenarios for 2015

The following six scenarios outline monthly expenses and income, using the average cost of rent in Pembroke and the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in 2015.

	Two parents with Two Children, Ontario Work	Single Parent with Two Children, Ontario Work	One Person Household, Ontario Works	One Person, Ontario Disability Support Program	One Person, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement	Two Parents with Two Children, Minimum Wage Earner (full-time)
Estimated total monthly income	\$2,196	1,988	\$740	\$1,193	\$1,544	\$2,882
Estimated monthly rent	\$948	\$790	\$650	\$636	\$636	\$948
Nutritious Food Basket cost	\$873	\$659	\$294	\$294	\$213	\$873
Percentage of income required for rent* (may or may not include hydro)	43%	40%	88%	53%	41%	33%
Percentage of income required for healthy food	40%	33%	40%	25%	14%	30%
What's Left?	\$375	\$539	-\$204	\$264	\$695	\$1,061
<p>Remember: People still need to pay for heat and hydro; phone, internet and cable; laundry, toiletries and household cleaning products; insurance; transportation (bus pass, taxi or car expenses); clothing; debt payments and banking service charges; non-prescription and prescription drug costs; and, child care and children's school costs.</p>						

* Average apartment rents for Pembroke based on Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Spring 2015 Market Rental Report survey data and data from Renfrew County Housing Corporation.



Table 2: The Weekly Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Renfrew County and District

To estimate the weekly cost of a nutritious food basket for your household, follow these steps:

Step 1: Write down the age and gender of each person in the household.

Step 2: Use the Nutritious Food Basket Weekly Costs and write down the weekly food cost for each person. Add up these weekly food costs for the subtotal.

Step 3: It costs a little more to feed a small group and less to feed a large group. Multiply the subtotal by the amount below for number of people in the household:

- 1 person – multiply by 1.20 4 people – make no change
- 2 people – multiply by 1.10 5 people – multiply by 0.95
- 3 people – multiply by 1.05 6 people – multiply by 0.90

Step 4: To find out the monthly costs, multiply your total by 4.33.

Here is an example:

Example: a family of five		
Gender	Age	Food Cost Per Week
Male	40	\$56.65
Female	37	\$47.74
Male	14	\$65.26
Boy	4	\$32.91
Girl	8	\$31.89
Subtotal (per week) \$234.45		
Multiply by .95	\$222.73 per week	
Total X 4.33	\$964.42 per month	

Nutritious Food Basket Weekly Costs RCDHU, 2015		
Gender	Age (years)	Food Cost per week (\$)
Boys	2-3	25.40
	4-8	32.91
Girls	2-3	24.88
	4-8	31.89
Males	9-13	44.51
	14-18	65.26
	19-30	63.04
	31-50	56.65
	51-70	54.79
Females	Over 70	54.32
	9-13	37.70
	14-18	45.61
	19-30	48.30
	31-50	47.74
Pregnant Women	51-70	41.62
	Over 70	40.97
	18 and younger	51.56
Breastfeeding Women	19-30	52.13
	31-50	51.00
	18 and younger	53.89
Reference Family of Four	19-30	56.06
	31-50	54.92
	Male 31 – 50	201.54
	Female 31-50	
	Boy 14 -18	
	Girl 4-8	



Food Insecurity and Renfrew County and District

Food insecurity is a local issue, with 11.6% of people in Renfrew County and District households being food insecure. This means that they could be worried about not having enough to eat, compromise the quality of food eaten, or not have a variety of food choices on hand.

When money is tight people are forced to cope by cutting into their food budget. They skip meals or fill up on cheap foods that are not necessarily nutritious. Parents living on low incomes will go without eating to make sure that their children can eat.

The health effects of not being able to afford a nutritious diet

People in food insecure households:

- Have less milk, fruits and vegetables
- Often do not get enough important nutrients such as folate, iron, zinc and vitamin A
- Find it more difficult to manage chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure
- Are more likely to report having poor physical health, poor mental health, multiple health conditions, restricted activity and poor social support
- Are less productive at work or less able to do well in school
- Are more likely to become a high-cost user of health care

Lack of sufficient income is the root cause of food insecurity

Food charity, such as food banks, community meal programs and emergency food access programs provide only short-term relief to some people who are food insecure. They do not address the root cause of food insecurity which is poverty. Therefore, a broader and longer-term strategy that addresses the causes of poverty including inadequate income, precarious employment and lack of affordable housing is needed. To learn more about hunger and poverty, please visit: PROOF, Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity: <http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/>

Advocate for solutions:

- A Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) to provide a basic minimum income for all. Visit:
 - Association of Local Public Health Agencies Resolutions June 2015 – Public Health Support for a Basic Income Guarantee – http://www.alphaweb.org/?page=alPHa_Resolutions Click on: Resolutions passed at the most recent AGM
 - Basic Income Canada – www.bienCanada.ca
- Increased social assistance rates, indexed to inflation to reflect the actual cost of living
- Health benefits (e.g., drug, dental) for low income people
- Affordable housing and accessible transportation
- Accessible and affordable child care

Need More Information?

Please contact: Renfrew County and District Health Unit

Health Info Line: 613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097 or visit www.rcdhu.com