

Media Release

The Price of Eating Well In Timiskaming

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Annual Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) costing for the district of Timiskaming was conducted by the Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) as mandated by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

The Timiskaming 2008 NFB Report reveals that the cost to purchase groceries for a nutritionally adequate diet is **\$143.32** per week or \$620.58 per month for a family of four (two adults with two children) in the Timiskaming district.

This reflects an increase of 4.1% or \$5.70 from 2007. This follows the trend noted in previous years, with the cost of a nutritious food basket in Timiskaming increasing by approximately 4% every year since 2005, reports Tracey Reid, THU's Epidemiologist. Official data from all Ontario health units has not been released for 2007 or 2008, but preliminary analysis indicates that the average weekly cost across Ontario for 2007 was \$135.39.¹ In 2007, the cost of a nutritious food basket in Timiskaming was 1.6% higher (or \$2.23 more) than the Ontario average, adds Reid.

On average, Canadians allocate a relatively small percentage of their total personal disposable income to food. In 2005, Canadian consumers spent 9.3% of their total household expenditures on food and non-alcoholic beverages. Based on 2003 Organization for Economic Development data, only the UK and the U.S. have recorded lower shares.²

The most significant barrier to accessing a nutritious diet is inadequate income. Households on fixed incomes (i.e. Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support, Old Age Security) and households earning minimum wage in Ontario struggle to meet all financial responsibilities. Families who find themselves in this situation often pay the rent and necessary bills, leaving limited money for food. This situation, called food insecurity, results in poor nutrition and stress about getting enough food to eat.

Why does it matter? Food Insecurity and Health:

Food insecurity is significantly correlated with inadequate nutrition. "Poor nutrition can have serious physical and mental health implications such as:

- Poor pregnancy and birth outcomes

- Negative impact on growth and development of children

- Reduced learning and productivity

- Chronic health conditions (i.e. type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure)

- Nutrient deficiencies, compromised immune system and susceptibility to infections.

Feelings of deprivation and social isolation," says Kerry Schubert-Mackey Registered Dietitian with the Timiskaming Health Unit. These conditions cost more to treat and manage than they would cost to prevent by ensuring people are financially able to purchase an adequate, nourishing diet.

This is a complicated issue, what can we do?

Take the challenge! Be Aware, Make it Easy, Be Involved, Speak Out!

"Sustaining a safe, affordable, accessible, acceptable food supply is a complex issue which individuals alone cannot solve. Recent reports underscore the need for action at various levels." adds Schubert-Mackey.

At the **global, national, provincial and regional level**, governments, non-government organizations and industry need to work together to develop and refine programs and policies to reduce health

The NFB is a standardized food costing tool that measures the cost of eating well. It does not include any non-food items such as personal care items or household supplies, nor does it account for special dietary needs. The NFB does not account for other barriers to healthy eating such as transportation, limited cooking skills, or limited food storage.

inequities, especially those aimed at areas such as affordable housing, employment, reducing poverty, food pricing and the marketing of unhealthy food choices targeting children and youth.

Local communities must work together to create the kind of environments where we work, live, learn and play that make the healthy choice the easy choice for **all**. All sectors including workplaces and schools to healthcare and municipalities have a role to play and collaboration is critical. A local **Call to Action** document for healthy weights -healthy lives in Timiskaming (www.timiskaminghu.com), offers a menu of credible actions taking into account the many factors, such as income, that influence healthy living. Health promotion staff at the Timiskaming Health Unit are available to work with various sectors and community partners, using a comprehensive health promotion approach, to create or enhance supportive environments to address topics such as healthy eating, physical activity, healthy weights. In addition, each year the THU produces a NFB for Timiskaming which can be used by community agencies who work with individuals and families to guide them with budgeting for healthy eating.

Individuals, parents and caregivers can explore ways to enjoy the benefits of healthy eating on a budget. Some cost-saving tips to consider include:

- plan your meals for the week
- make a grocery list and stick to it, this can keep you from buying pricier, less nutritious foods on impulse or in-store promoted items that you don't need
- consider no-name brands and buying bulk food items is usually a good deal too
- watch for sales on items that **are** on your list
- prepare more meals from scratch, purchase fewer pre-prepared packaged foods
- learn to read labels to ensure you are getting a nutritional bang for your buck
- use the Timiskaming Nutritious Food Basket Report for a guide to budgeting for a healthy diet
- visit eatrightontario.ca for more cost-saving tips for the food groups in Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

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Vision ~ "Total Wellness of our



Community"

Mission ~ "Promote Health, Prevent Illness"

www.timiskaminghu.com

(1) Association of Local Public Health Agencies. Nutritious Food Basket Survey Report, September 14, 2007.

(2) Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada www.agr.gc.ca 28-03-2008