

Snapshot of Nutritious Food Basket Cost and Availability in Three Main Stores in the Inner City of Winnipeg

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Marnie McQuade and Marina Sominsky

For participants of the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program in Manitoba there is a considerable difference between available funds allotted for basic needs and how much these necessities of life, actually cost. Food availability and affordability is one of the primary issues faced by participants of EIA and others who have a low income level.

Our goal in this study was to survey both food availability and affordability for EIA participants to compare with their current budget allotted for basic needs. Considering the fact that a portion of the EIA often go toward supplementing housing and other costs of living, the shortage of funds available for food, clothing, transportation, personal and household supplies cause distress for individuals and families who are trying to meet their most basic needs.

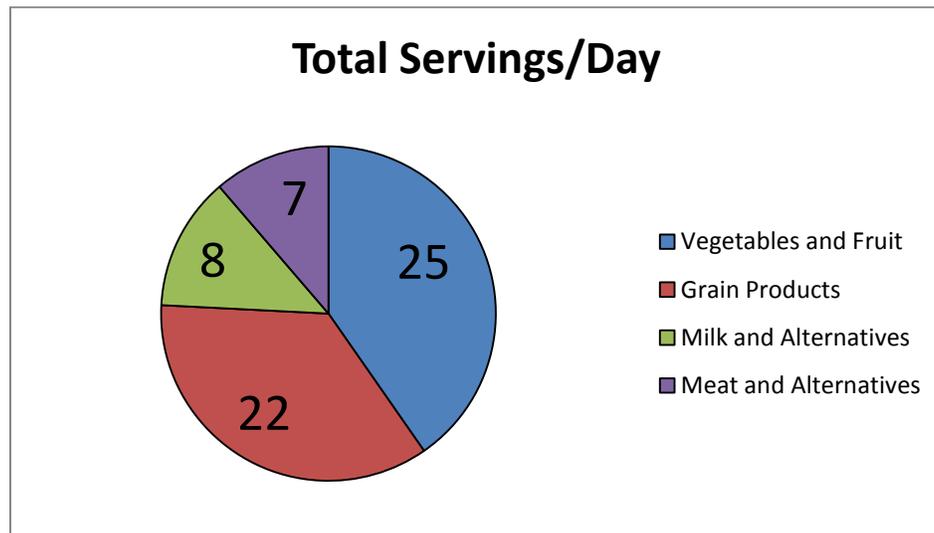
We visited three centrally located stores in Winnipeg (Safeway, Giant Tiger, and Neechi Commons) to determine the average monthly cost of buying nutritious food and its availability. The Nutritious Food Basket Guidance Document from the Ministry of Health Promotion of Ontario, The Cost of Eating According to the 'Nutritious Food Basket' in Manitoba 2011, and Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide all aided in guiding this process.

We used a hypothetical family structure consisting of four individuals, two parents male and female between nineteen and fifty years of age and two children; a girl age four and a boy age eight. The Nutritious Food Basket Guidance Document was used to determine which foods to survey (67 food items). We recorded the lowest regular price of each item and converted each

food item's purchase unit to serving sizes according to Canada's Food Guide. Calculations then were made to determine total monthly costs for each store. Table 1 illustrates the total number of daily servings required for our reference family of four for each of the food groups.

Table 1- The recommended number of servings from each of the four food groups a family of four should consume each day (Adapted from: Canada's Food Guide)

	Girl Age 4	Boy Age 8	Adult Female	Adult Man	Total Servings/Day
Vegetables and Fruit	5	5	7	8	25
Grain Products	4	4	6	8	22
Milk and Alternatives	2	2	2	2	8
Meat and Alternatives	1	1	2	3	7



Food items that could not be converted meaningfully to serving sizes were not included in the nutritious food basket calculation of cost. These items include: flour, whole wheat; flour, white, enriched; raisins; cookies; cracker and regular quick cooking oatmeal (not instant).

The National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Release 27(2015) was used to convert each food item's purchase unit into serving sizes. This resource contains a conversion tool for various measurements of food items including weights to volumes and vice versa.

We found that all three stores offered different variety and availability of the food items required to create a balanced and nutritious diet. Table 2 provides the percentage of food availability at all three stores we surveyed.

Table 2- Food Availability at Different Stores

Percentage of Food Availability	
Safeway	98%
Giant Tiger	66%
Neechi Commons	79%

Due to discrepancies in food availability, we chose to only analyze the food items these three stores had in common. This significantly reduced the amount of food items we originally surveyed by 50%, greatly reducing variety but still providing enough servings from each one of the main four food groups. To make up for those food items that were missing, we allocated proportionate servings to available foods in the respective food group. We added 5% to account for wastage and another 5% to account for miscellaneous foods such as baking supplies, spices, condiments and oil. The results for monthly costs of the amended food list are as follows: Safeway, \$773.86; Giant Tiger, \$602.70; and Neechi Commons, \$692.37.

The Cost of Eating According to the Nutritious Food Basket in Manitoba May 2011 reports that the average monthly food cost for a family of four in Central Winnipeg is between \$797.01 and \$821.63. This document provides a comprehensive view of food costing in Manitoba and should be used as a primary data source. Our survey of three centrally located

stores is meant to be used as a snapshot of food cost and availability. The prices our data produced are less than the Nutritious Food Basket of Manitoba due to the small number of stores surveyed and the discrepancy of available foods. The reduction of foods available brings down the cost due to availability issues. As variety increases, so will the price. The Nutritious Food Basket of Manitoba surveyed more stores and is therefore a more reliable data point. However, the snapshot we are providing is relevant because these stores are highly frequented by participants of the EIA program and our objective is to compare and contrast EIA purchase power in the current market.

It is important to note that the nutritious Food Basket cost at Safeway, before we eliminated items not available in all three stores, was: \$862.50. However, this price went down to \$773.86 as the food variety decreased. Since the cost of nutritious food at Safeway went down as variety decreased, it would be reasonable to assume that the Nutritious Food Basket cost at Giant Tiger and Neechi Commons would increase as variety increases.

According to The Employment and Income Assistance Act, our reference family of four is eligible for \$728.40 to cover the basic needs. In order for that family to modestly meet their monthly nutritional requirements they would need to spend their entire monthly benefit allowance only on food, leaving little to nothing for their other basic needs.

To conclude, this snapshot of the cost of nutritious food in these three centrally located Winnipeg stores provides valuable insight into the challenges people who live at or below the poverty level face to access and afford nutritious food. Neechi Commons and Giant Tiger are two stores that are frequented by low income individuals and families who rely on EIA, but since food variety was low in these locations we believe it erroneously appears as the nutritious food basket cost in these locations is low and thus affordable. So after looking closely at these stores

we believe that for low income population to meet their nutritious needs, more full range grocery stores should be available in the inner city. In addition, variety and availability of food must be maintained to eliminate food insecurity issues in an already vulnerable population.

References

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