

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

Published by The Food Commission. ISSN 0953-5047

Issue 80 ♦ January/March 2008 ♦ £4.95

Poor pay more for good food

Exclusive research by *The Food Magazine* shows that eating healthily costs about 50% more – rising to almost 60% extra in low income neighbourhoods.

Twenty years ago, in 1988, Community Dietitian Cathy Mooney conducted a survey of food prices in different neighbourhoods of north London. Taking a basket of common foods, she compared the prices of the regular and the healthier versions of each item.

As a dietitian, Mooney was concerned that the cost and availability of healthier foods being recommended by health workers might be a problem for some of their clients, especially those trying to make ends meet on a tight budget.

She found that food prices generally tended to be lower in more deprived areas, but the healthier basket of food cost more wherever she looked. And the difference, the price 'premium' needed to pay for a healthier basket of food, was greater in lower income areas.

The Food Magazine repeated this survey in 1995 and again in 2001 (with a slightly different basket), and we have now undertaken the survey a fourth time.

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Dinner ladies play a vital role in helping children to eat healthily, yet their wages rarely reflect their importance.

See 'High art, low wages' on page 7 for more information about campaigns for a Living Wage.

Temples that feed thousands free every week

More than 35,000 vegetarian meals are served entirely for free every week at two Sikh temples in Southall, London. Langar is the word for the free food offered at all Sikh temples (called Gurdwara). The temples are open every day providing meals to all who come, regardless of faith.

The provision of such food is at the heart of Sikhism, in which all people are considered equal, embodied by the sharing of meals together. The food is offered for free so that anyone can come, no matter what their circumstances. *The Food Magazine* visited the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara to find out more about a British Heart Foundation project to improve the nutritional quality of the meals on offer.

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These Sikh women do voluntary cooking preparation at the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara (temple) in Southall, London. Many arrive at 2.30am to start the day's work. Photo by Jessica Mitchell.

Healthy food costs more

Continued from front cover

The results of *The Food Magazine's* latest healthy food basket survey

In every survey we have found that families in low income neighbourhoods face a double burden: the healthier foods are not only more expensive than the less healthy options, but also the extra premium needed is actually greater in low income areas.

Furthermore, the size of this premium has been growing significantly, with the latest survey showing that households in poorer neighbourhoods would need to find almost 60% more cash to buy healthier

foods than equivalent less healthy items. In affluent areas the health premium was less than 40%. Back in 1988, this premium was only 20% in low income areas and 16% in affluent areas.

Our latest survey also found the healthier options to be unavailable in many of the local stores in lower income areas. In contrast, the less healthy items were often available as special offers or in large packs, encouraging increased consumption.

The Food Commission's latest price survey

The Food Commission's new survey of food baskets was conducted in north London during

October and November 2007. Shops were selected on the basis of known household characteristics in the vicinity, primarily the concentration of social housing.

Food prices were obtained from shop displays and labelling. Quantities were standardised to provide equal amounts of the healthier and less healthy items. Where the standard size was unavailable, attempts were made to obtain prices for larger and smaller sizes and standardise between these. Where a product was unavailable, the average standardised price of the product from other shops in the same category (affluent or low income) was used. The items in the basket are listed below (similar to the baskets used in 1988 and 1995, and a sub-sample of the survey of 2001).

■ **Research: Lindsay Rodrigues.**

How the health premium has increased for all of us

	Regular basket £	Healthier basket £	Health premium: average extra cost of healthier foods
1988	9.78	11.56	18%
1995	11.04	15.11	37%
2001*	12.72	19.19	51%
2007	16.01	23.71	48%

*2001 basket differed from the other three surveys

The 2007 health premium is significantly higher in low income neighbourhoods

	Regular basket £	Healthier basket £	Health premium: average extra cost of healthier foods
Low income areas	15.26	24.15	58%
Affluent areas	16.75	23.27	39%

The equivalent figures for 1988 were 20% and 16% for the low income and affluent premiums respectively. In 1995 they were 41% and 31% respectively.



Participants in a Food Commission 'Eat less salt' project work out which beans are healthiest. The Food Commission has been working with a housing association in south London. The majority of residents are on low incomes and can find it challenging to afford healthier options.



Less healthy basket	Healthier basket
Cheese spread	Cottage Cheese
Full fat cheddar	Edam
Whole milk	Semi-Skimmed milk
Soft margarine	Low fat margarine
Vegetable oil	Polyunsaturated vegetable oil
White bread	Wholemeal bread
White rice	Brown rice
Cornflakes	Weetabix
White spaghetti	Wholemeal spaghetti
White flour	Wholemeal flour
Tinned baked beans	Tinned baked beans reduced sugar
Peaches in syrup	Peaches in fruit juice
Minced beef	Low fat minced beef
Pork sausages	Low fat pork sausages
Beef burgers	Low fat beef burgers