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# Your Weekly Food Bill

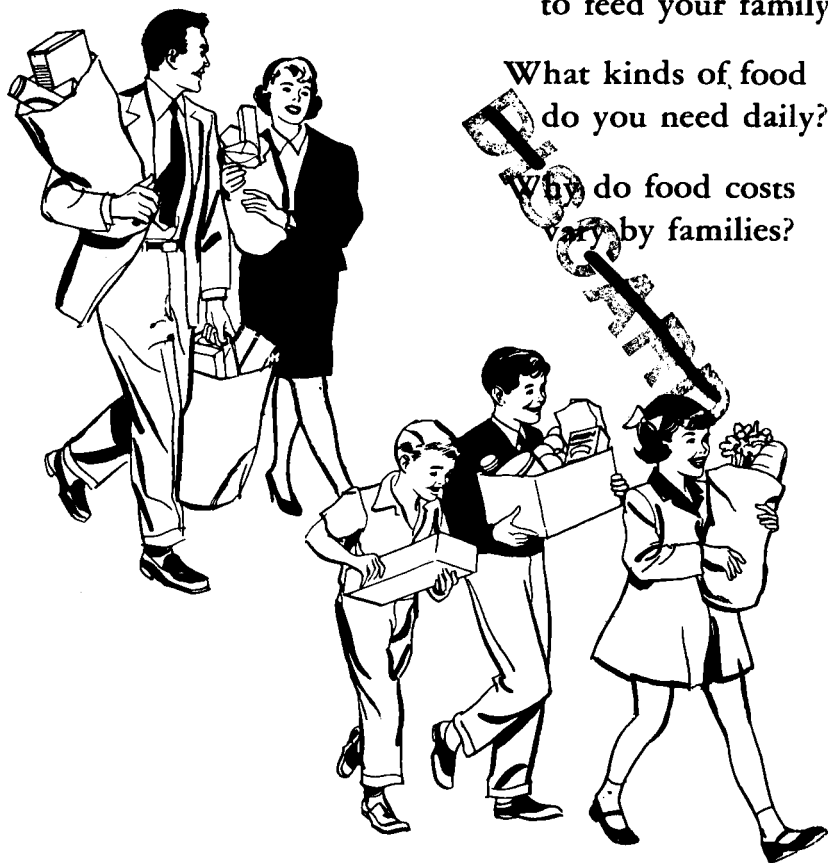
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What does it cost  
to feed your family?

What kinds of food  
do you need daily?

Why do food costs  
vary by families?



Cooperative Extension Service  
Oregon State University, Corvallis

Extension Circular 686

Revised July 1971

# Your Weekly Food Bill

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## What does it cost to feed your family?

Three family food plans developed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture are used as guides to estimate the quantities of foods to buy in a week for families of varied size and composition. The table below gives the estimated cost of each of these food plans.

### Cost of One Week's Food at Home, Western Region

Sex-age groups	Low-cost plan	Moderate-cost plan	Liberal plan
	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
<b>FAMILIES</b>			
Family of two, 20 to 35 years .....	18.80	22.80	28.30
Family of two, 55 to 75 years .....	15.30	19.10	23.10
Family of four, preschool children .....	27.40	33.10	40.40
Family of four, school children ....	31.80	38.50	47.60
<b>INDIVIDUALS</b>			
Children, under 1 year .....	3.70	4.40	4.80
1 to 3 years .....	4.70	5.60	6.60
3 to 6 years .....	5.60	6.80	8.10
6 to 9 years .....	6.80	8.20	10.30
Girls, 9 to 12 years .....	7.70	9.40	11.10
12 to 15 years .....	8.50	10.40	12.60
15 to 20 years .....	8.60	10.30	12.40
Boys, 9 to 12 years .....	7.90	9.60	11.60
12 to 15 years .....	9.30	11.50	13.70
15 to 20 years .....	10.60	12.80	15.50
Women, 20 to 35 years .....	7.90	9.60	11.70
35 to 55 years .....	7.60	9.20	11.30
55 to 75 years .....	6.40	8.00	9.60
75 years and over .....	5.80	7.10	8.80
Pregnant .....	9.40	11.20	13.30
Nursing .....	10.90	12.90	15.20
Men, 20 to 35 years .....	9.20	11.10	14.00
35 to 55 years .....	8.50	10.30	12.70
55 to 75 years .....	7.50	9.40	11.40
75 years and over .....	7.00	9.00	10.90

Data are based on average prices paid per pound of each food group by nonfarm families at three selected income levels. "Estimated Retail Food Prices by Cities," compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics are used to adjust prices.

In the table on page 2, costs for families of two were increased 10 percent to adjust for family size. In families of four, calculations are based on parents 20 to 35 years old, preschoolers 1 to 3 and 3 to 6 years old; and parents 20 to 35 years old; school children 6 to 9, and boy 9 to 12.

For individuals, costs are given for those in four-person families. For other size families, adjust as follows:

Number in family	
One .....	add 20%
Two .....	add 10%
Three .....	add 5%
Five .....	subtract 5%
Six or more .....	subtract 10%

Here is an example using a couple (36 and 38 years old) with a boy of 12 on a moderate-cost plan:

INDIVIDUAL	COST
Woman .....	\$ 9.20
Man .....	10.30
Boy .....	11.50
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>\$31.00</b>

For a family of three, add 5% .....

Estimated weekly food cost for this family .....

Food costs on the opposite page *do not* include nonfood items such as cigarettes, laundry supplies, and paper goods that are also bought at the market, nor the cost of meals eaten away from home. The cost of food at restaurants and other commercial food service establishments is higher than the cost of food prepared at home, so if family members eat away from home the food budget will have to be increased.

**What are the differences in the three food plans?** The low-cost plan has larger quantities of potatoes, dry beans and peas, and flour and cereals. The moderate-cost plan includes larger quantities of milk, meat, fruits and vegetables, some higher-priced cuts of meat, a few out-of-season foods, and some convenience foods. The liberal plan is for families who want and can afford more meats and fruits and vegetables, and greater variety.

## *Food Plans for Families of Different Sizes and Incomes*

Income in year (after income taxes)	Family size			
	Two persons	Three persons	Four persons	Five persons
\$2,000-\$4,000	Low-cost	Low-cost <sup>1</sup>	Low-cost <sup>1</sup>	Low-cost <sup>1</sup>
\$4,000-\$6,000	Moderate- cost	Low-cost	Low-cost	Low-cost <sup>1</sup>
\$6,000-\$8,000	Liberal	Moderate- cost	Low-cost or moderate- cost	Low-cost
\$8,000-\$10,000	Liberal	Moderate- cost or liberal	Moderate- cost	Low-cost or moderate- cost
\$10,000 and over	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal	Moderate- cost or liberal

<sup>1</sup> To afford the low-cost plan, these families would have to either use a larger part of their income for food than families of this size and income ordinarily do or obtain food assistance through programs available in the locality, such as the Food Stamp Program and the Abundant Food Program.

### What kinds of food does your family need daily?

#### DAIRY FOODS



Three or four glasses of milk for children, four or more glasses for teenagers, two or more glasses for adults, four to six or more glasses for pregnant and nursing women. Cheese, ice cream, and other milk-made foods can supply part of the milk.

#### MEAT



Two or more servings of meat, fish, poultry, eggs, or cheese, or dry beans, peas, or nuts.



## VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

Four or more servings, including dark green or deep yellow vegetables, citrus fruit, or tomatoes.



## BREADS AND CEREALS

Four or more servings of whole grain or enriched cereals, breads and other baked goods, rice, barley, noodles, macaroni, and so forth.

Plus fats and oils, sugars and sweets as needed to complete meals and provide needed energy.

## Why do some families have higher food bills?

Some reasons might be:

- **Age of children.** Teenagers, during their rapid growth years, need a third or more food than adults.
- **Food habits.** Families eat meat at more meals, serve choice cuts instead of ground beef or stew meat or meat-extending dishes such as casseroles, and buy soft drinks.
- **Nonfood items charged to food bill.** Shoppers purchase many nonfood items at the market and include them in the cost of food; cleaning supplies, health and beauty aids, and magazines are examples.
- **Unplanned shopping.** "Impulse buying" can increase a food bill. A list of needed foods and "specials" to serve as a guide in shopping helps to avoid bringing home items that might duplicate those on hand or purchasing more perishables than can be quickly consumed.
- **Use of out-of-season foods.** Fresh fruits and vegetables bought out of season cost more.
- **Failure to take advantage of sales.** Studies show definite savings can be made by buying regularly used foods when they are on "special."
- **Pet foods.** Food for dogs, cats, or other pets should not be included when figuring the cost of the family's food.

- **Frequent use of ready-to-serve foods.** Not all, but many "convenience" foods cost more than those prepared by the homemaker.
- **Fancy packaging.** Buying foods on the basis of the container rather than on the weight of contents or cost per serving can increase food bills.
- **Party foods.** "Fancy" items such as pickles, olives, special dressings, and gourmet and snack foods run up food costs. Outdoor cooking may involve the purchase of expensive foods.
- **Expensive "food plans."** Sometimes families commit themselves to monthly-payment purchase plans that involve a freezer, large stocks of frozen meats, or other foods they would not normally buy, plus interest charges. (Don't be "taken in." Check the cost of comparable items from local dealers before signing a contract.)

Food expenditures take about 16 percent of our spendable income. The informed shopper, by making wise purchases, can get more for her food dollar.

OSU's Extension Food Marketing Program is designed to help you be a better informed food shopper.

*Consumer information* is made available to the public through the local county Extension agent. Watch for current food-buying information in news columns in the papers or on radio or television programs. Visit or telephone the Extension office for assistance with food preparation or buying.