



HEHA FOR HEALTH



WELLINGTON'S RISING COST OF FOOD

How big is the problem?

Food price hikes are putting pressure on everyone. In the past year food prices in Wellington were significantly above the national average at around 11-12%¹. It's no wonder that food banks in Wellington – and throughout the country – are increasingly being called upon to help out struggling families.

Food Security

The term “food security” makes you think of a lock on your pantry door or hiding the chocolate biscuits. In fact, *food security* is used to describe the situation of always having enough nutritious food. *Food insecurity* is about not having enough food, being hungry, being stressed out about getting food, or using a food bank.

When faced with increasing bills, families often spend less on food and basics such as milk, cheese, fruit and vegetables become luxury items. Fruit and vegetables are filled with goodness and ought to dominate all family meals. Growing children need calcium for strong bones, and milk is the best place to get that calcium. However, increasingly, these essential foods are being swapped for less healthy (though cheap and filling) alternatives. A less healthy diet leads to health problems, and worrying about food can affect mental health.

Seeking Help

Discuss your problems with Work and Income (www.workandincome.govt.nz). You may qualify for a Special Needs Grant to help with emergency food costs. However, note that conditions apply, such as being on a low income and having no money in the bank. The amount you may get varies depending on your family situation.



Some Simple Solutions

- Plan your meals a week ahead, make a list and stick to it.
- Cook enough dinner to take some for lunch the next day.
- Meals with minced meat (such as spaghetti bolognese) will go further by adding pasta, extra vegetables or a tin of beans.
- Cook from the basics. For example, a homemade pasta sauce is cheaper than buying it. Make in large quantities and freeze.
- Look for discounts and plan your meals around them. Buy ‘specials’.
- Plan snacks ahead, especially for work. This will be healthier and cheaper than the tuck shop, cafeteria, vending machine or dairy.
- Drink water rather than juice, cordial or fizzy drinks.
- Make salads from grated carrot and apple, or coleslaw from cabbage. Both are usually cheaper than lettuce.
- Freeze unused ingredients like tomato paste, lemon juice, stock, grated cheese and coconut milk.
- Grow your own herbs and vegetables.
- Make your own soup.

Minestrone Soup (Cost - \$7.73)²

Minestrone is a hearty soup and meal in a bowl if you add pasta and beans or bacon. Without the optional extras this works out to be around \$1 per serve. Adding bacon will increase the price, but buying seasonal veggies and visiting the veggie markets can bring the cost down further.

Ingredients (serves 6-8)

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped (around 1 cup)
- 1 leek, quartered lengthwise and chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 x 400g cans tomatoes
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable stock (use stock cubes mixed with water)
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/3 cup pasta (whatever you can find)
- handful fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and pepper

Optional

- 2 rashers bacon, fat removed and chopped
- 420g can white beans (e.g. cannellini, butter or haricot beans)
- Other veggies (e.g. capsicum, pumpkin, spinach)

Instructions

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add the onion, garlic, celery and leek and stir until beginning to soften. Add the (optional) bacon, cook for 2 more minutes. Add the other vegetables and cook over a gentle heat for around 10 minutes, stirring until vegetables begin to soften. Add the tomatoes, stock, sugar, salt and pepper and simmer for 10 minutes. When the vegetables are soft add the pasta, parsley and (optional) canned beans, and simmer a further 10 minutes, stirring frequently to prevent the pasta from sticking to the base of the pan. Serve with bread, or by itself!

² Modified from The Healthy Food Guide website (www.healthyfood.co.nz/recipes/2007/may/minestrone-soup)

¹ Otago University Food Cost Survey, 2008