



No Money for Food is...Cent\$less

December 2019

Food Insecurity in Peterborough

Food insecurity – inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints – is a serious social and public health problem in Ontario. People who are food insecure cannot afford to buy the food they want or need for good health. Limited incomes are the main reason why people are food insecure in Peterborough.

People living in food insecure households:

- worry about not having enough to eat,
- compromise the quality and/or quantity of food eaten, or
- do not have a variety of food choices on hand.

What are food insecurity rates in the County and City of Peterborough?

Between the years of 2011-2014,

- 16% or 1 in 6 households experienced food insecurity compared to 12% in Ontario,
- 30% of households with children under the age of 18 experienced food insecurity compared to 15.5% in Ontario, and
- 1 out of every 2 female lone parent families experienced food insecurity, compared to 1 in 4 female lone parent families in Ontario.



Low Incomes Don't Add Up

- People living on social assistance often find that, after paying for rent and utilities, there is not enough money to buy nourishing food. Between 2013 and 2014, food insecurity affected 64% of Ontario households living on social assistance.
- Food insecurity is highest among Indigenous people, low income households on fixed incomes, single mothers and people who do not own a home.
- In Canada in 2012, 62.2% of food insecure households reported their main source of income as wages, salaries or self-employment. These are people who are part of the labour force, trapped in low-paying or unstable jobs.

Poverty and Health... Did You Know?

- People who are food insecure report poorer health than people with higher incomes. Being food insecure makes people more vulnerable to chronic diseases (i.e., heart disease, diabetes, cancer). These risks increase with the level of food insecurity.
- People who are food insecure may eat less vegetables and fruits, and milk products because they cannot afford them. They are forced to skip meals or fill up on cheap foods that are not as nutritious.
- Severe food insecurity and experiences of child and youth hunger impact children's wellbeing. They are at greater risk for conditions like asthma, depression and suicidal thoughts in adolescence and early adulthood.
- Household food insecurity impacts the Ontario health care system. People who are food insecure have higher annual health care costs.

About the Nutritious Food Basket

In May 2019, Peterborough Public Health staff priced the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). NFB is Ontario's standardized food costing tool used by Health Units to measure the cost of healthy eating. Foods included belong to the food groupings found in Canada's Food Guide (fruits and vegetables, whole grains and protein foods) and were chosen based on Canadian eating and purchasing patterns. Food costs are recorded according to the lowest available price at the grocery store. *(See over for results.)*



Understanding the Nutritious Food Basket

Generally, highly processed foods and food with little or no nutritional value (such as soft drinks and potato chips) are not included. The food basket does not contain any foods for special diets, such as gluten-free products. Personal and household care items, like toothpaste, soap and cleaning supplies are not included.











The Nutritious Food Basket design assumes:

- most people have the necessary time, food skills and equipment to be able to prepare most meals from scratch; and,
- people have access to quality grocery stores.

How Do We Know Some People Don't Have Enough Money For Food?

A summary of some real life situations for people living in Peterborough appears in Table 1. These scenarios show that after paying for shelter and food, minimum wage earners and households on fixed incomes have little, if any money left over to cover other basic monthly expenses.

Table 1:
May 2019 Peterborough
Nutritious Food Basket
Scenarios

	Households with Children				Single Person Households		
	Family of 4, Ontario Works	Family of 4, Full-time Minimum Wage Earner	Family of 4, Median Income (after tax)	Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works	One Person Household, Ontario Works	One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program	One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement
 Monthly Income including benefits and credits	\$2,623	\$3,633	\$7,983	\$2,401	\$825	\$1,272	\$1,727
 Estimated Shelter Cost	\$1,322 50% of income	\$1,322 36% of income	\$1,322 17% of income	\$1,077 45% of income	\$734 89% of income	\$916 72% of income	\$916 53% of income
 Cost of Nutritious Food	\$938 36% of income	\$938 26% of income	\$938 12% of income	\$710 30% of income	\$315 38% of income	\$315 25% of income	\$230 13% of income
 What's Left? (for utilities, phone, transportation, cleaning supplies, personal care items, clothing, gifts, entertainment, pets, internet, school essentials, medical and dental costs and other purchases.	\$362.60	\$1,372.60	\$5,722.60	\$614.47	-\$224.19 (Negative)	\$40.81	\$580.97
							

NOTE: Shelter costs may or may not include utilities.

Does Food Cost Too Much?

The cost of food is not the issue for most people. The issue is that **incomes are too low**.

For people living on low incomes, there is not enough money left to buy healthy food after paying rent and utility bills.

How much do you spend on food in a month?

The cost of feeding a family of four in Peterborough rose to \$938 in May 2019. That represents 12% of an average family's income.

In contrast, this cost of food represents 26% of the income of a family supported by a minimum wage earner or 36% of the income for a family receiving Ontario Works.

What Can We Do About Poverty and Food Insecurity?

Educate yourself. Food insecurity is an income issue.

- Learn more about the root causes of poverty and food insecurity. Understand that food banks are not a long-term solution to food insecurity. Find out how food insecurity affects health care and social costs that impact everyone. Visit odph.ca/centsless or proof.utoronto.ca

Advocate for change. Speak up. Your voice can make a difference.

- Write to your local MP, MPP or Council member. Use this report to increase their understanding of poverty and its impacts on the most vulnerable in our community. Consider what improved social assistance rates, increased minimum wage, a living wage, affordable housing, affordable childcare and a national drug plan would mean for people in our community and their food security.
- Learn more about a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) as a policy that will provide an income sufficient for life's basic needs, guaranteed by the government to all. Visit www.basicincomecanada.org or nourishproject.ca/basic-income-peterborough-network.
- Support food systems planning that makes healthy, local food a priority. To learn more about the Peterborough Food Charter, visit www.foodinpeterborough.ca/food-charter.

Support local food programs while working to end poverty.

- Food programs provide short-term relief for those in need and offer skill-building opportunities while work continues on longer-term strategies addressing food insecurity. Support programs (i.e., community gardens, gleaning, collective kitchens, community meal programs, food boxes and the Nourish Project) by volunteering your time or fundraising. Visit www.foodinpeterborough.ca and nourishproject.ca.



For food cost details and references, please call the Nutrition Promotion Program, Peterborough Public Health, at 705-743-1000 or visit www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca.

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