

**Going hungry:  
the struggle to eat healthily  
on a low income**



**the children's charity**

# Going hungry: the struggle to eat healthily on a low income

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NCH, the children's charity, helps children and young people facing difficulties or challenges in their lives.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## Background

Today we are almost overwhelmed by adverts and advice about the importance of healthy living. Millions of pounds are spent by government advising us about the dangers of smoking and the excessive consumption of alcohol, and the importance of exercise. Yet when it comes to food the government seems to be preoccupied with standards and safety, with less emphasis on promoting healthy eating and diet. While ensuring food safety is important, so too is healthy eating. Healthy living requires a balanced diet as well as exercise.

The thought of people not having enough money to eat or parents not being able to provide healthy food for their family is not something normally associated with the fourth largest economy in the world. However, this is a reality in 21st-century Britain. Despite the exponential growth of consumer choice many families living on low incomes are still unable to maintain a healthy diet. This is a situation none of us can be proud of and something that all of us – government, industry, communities, families and individuals – have a role in eradicating.

When we think about food poverty we often think of poorer countries in the developing world. But there are obvious examples of food poverty here too, such as queuing for food at soup kitchens or begging on the streets. Yet while this may hit hard on our conscience, it still only draws our attention to the visible aspects of food poverty. There are many other facets of food poverty that we fail to see; for example, when parents go without food in order to feed their children or when healthy products are overlooked in the supermarket for cheaper, less nutritious foods.

## What is food poverty?

A widely accepted definition of food poverty is 'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so'.<sup>1</sup>

Food poverty is a complex, multi-faceted problem, but one that is strongly correlated with income. For families struggling to make ends meet the money spent on food is the most flexible part of the budget. Rent, heating, insurance or repaying debt are fixed, but food costs can be cut at times of financial difficulty, often forcing the parent to make cheaper, less healthier choices. It is these decisions, compounded by the intermittent nature of low-paid employment, that makes it more likely that families on low incomes will be unable to purchase the basic foods required to maintain a balanced diet.

## Food security

Overcoming food poverty requires much more than increasing state benefits. Removing financial obstacles alone will not be sufficient to end food poverty. If we are to have a greater understanding of the causes of and solutions to food poverty we need to explore the extent of food security (see Box 1). We need to examine wider associated factors such as access to food, and consumer choice.

## Why is healthy eating important?

Poor diet has a serious effect on the health of the population. Women with an unhealthy diet are more likely to give birth to an underweight baby, which in turn may lead to poorer future health outcomes for the child. Children deprived of the necessary nutrition when growing up are less likely to achieve academically at school, but more likely to suffer from health problems later in life.

Unhealthy eating significantly increases the chances of suffering from heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and dental problems. Medical advances are addressing some aspects of these illnesses, but the best form of prevention starts with a healthy diet.

### Box 1 Food security

'Food security means that all people at all times should have physical and economic access to sufficient, affordable, safe and nutritious food necessary and appropriate for a healthy life, and the security of knowing that this access is sustainable in the future. In Britain this means people need:

- Access to food – to have enough money, and to be able to reach the kind of shops which stock the foods needed for health at affordable prices;
- To enjoy choice – the food people can buy has to be both safe, and necessary or appropriate for a healthy life and for the culture in which they live;
- Freedom from fear – as far as possible people should be free from anxiety about whether they will be able to eat properly.<sup>2</sup>

Assessing food poverty using this holistic approach allows policymakers to identify and address the physical as well as the financial obstacles to healthy eating.

The growing number of people in England who are considered obese is a major concern. It is a problem that particularly affects those on low incomes.<sup>3</sup> Women in unskilled manual occupations are twice as likely to be obese as women in a professional occupation.<sup>4</sup> One in five adults in the United Kingdom are obese, a figure that has tripled in 20 years. However, this trend is not just confined to adults; childhood obesity is also increasing at an alarming rate. It has been estimated 8.5 per cent of six year olds are obese, increasing to 15 per cent of 15 year olds.<sup>5</sup> This is a figure some have described as of 'epidemic' proportions.<sup>6</sup>

Strikingly, it has been estimated that 30,000 deaths in England in 1998 (6% of the total) were attributable to obesity, with each person losing nine years of life – accounting for a total of 270,000 lost years. According to the OECD this increase ranks us third highest behind the United States and Mexico in the proportion of population that is clinically obese.<sup>7</sup> The National

Audit Office have estimated the cost of obesity in England to be £2.6 billion, or 0.3 per cent of GDP.<sup>8</sup> This figure includes £9.5 million for the cost of treating obesity, £470 million to treat the consequences of obesity and £2.1 billion in lost earnings due to sickness and mortality.

### Policy developments

For much of the 1980s and 1990s there was no official recognition that food poverty existed in this country. Healthy eating was seen as the responsibility of the individual and failure to eat healthily was a result of irresponsible spending choices. The election of a Labour administration in 1997 marked a significant shift in thinking. Policymakers started to recognise the importance of ensuring a healthy diet and its link to health inequalities and poverty. This was highlighted in the Acheson Inquiry 1998 and in *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* 1999. This report identified the difficulties people living in deprived and rural areas have in accessing shops with affordable food, acknowledging that 'the poorest people often face the highest prices'.<sup>9</sup>

Building on this, the NHS Plan 2000 has put in place a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables. They included reforming the Welfare Food Programme to include fruit and vegetables as well as milk, the National Scheme for Fruit for all nursery and infant children, the 'five-a-day' programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and greater dialogue with the food industry to increase access to food using local co-operatives.

There has also been a considerable emphasis on schools as vehicles for improving children's diet. This has resulted in the establishment of the Healthy Schools Initiative, leading to School Nutrition Action Groups and the expansion of breakfast clubs, particularly in areas of high deprivation. In addition, there have been some interesting initiatives spearheaded by local authorities. For example, Hull City Council recently announced a pilot scheme to offer free healthy school meals to all primary pupils in Hull, although the evidence suggests that the quality of school meals varies considerably up and down the country.

Government now recognises the importance of addressing food poverty. But what impact are these initiatives making? Financial assistance to those in most danger of experiencing food poverty has significantly increased, but so too have food prices. Are those in most need any better off when it comes to healthy eating? What policy gaps still exist and what can we do to ensure that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, can eat healthily?

## The research

To start addressing these questions NCH decided to research the diets of children and families living on low incomes in the UK today. NCH's aim is 'to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable children' and we believe these children's views and those of their parents should inform the current debate about what we do eat and what we should eat.

NCH carried out similar research in 1991<sup>10</sup> and we wanted to find out what had changed over the intervening 12 years. NCH engaged the Food Commission to carry out this research. There were three stages:

- a regional survey of the costs of eating healthily and less healthily. NCH staff and volunteers carried out 40 shopping basket surveys across the UK. The basket of foods included 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' versions of basic items. An additional range of goods was included that could contribute to the 'five-a-day' fruit and vegetable intake recommended for health
- a questionnaire survey of 55 families living on low incomes across Great Britain
- two focus groups with families on low incomes, in an urban and rural area

The following chapters of this report will present the research findings: chapter 2 presents the findings from the shopping basket survey, chapter 3 highlights the diets of families living on low incomes from the questionnaire and focus groups, and chapter 4 puts forward a number of recommendations to improve the diets of children living in families on low incomes.

## Chapter 1 endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Poverty bites*, p2. CPAG, 2001

<sup>2</sup> *Poverty bites*, p4. CPAG, 2001

<sup>3</sup> *Tackling Obesity in England*, National Audit Office, 2001

<sup>4</sup> Let Us Eat Cake!, Sustain, Newsletter of the Food Poverty Network, Issue 29, September 2003

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Tackling Obesity in England*, National Audit Office 2001

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *Saving Lives, Our Healthier Nation*, Department of Health 1999

<sup>10</sup> *Poverty and Nutrition Survey: The difficulties of providing an adequate diet for families on benefits*, 1991 NCH

# Chapter 2 Shopping basket survey findings

## The cost of healthy eating over time

By comparing food products in our food basket survey with the findings with previous shopping basket surveys we have been able to establish the level of increases in the cost of healthy and unhealthy food since 1988.

	1988	1995	2003
Unhealthy	8.88	10.02	11.83
Healthy	10.70	13.98	15.96
Premium	20%	40%	35%
Unhealthy basket price compared to 1988		+13%	+33%
Healthy basket price compared to 1988		+31%	+49%

**Note:** The restricted list of products included in the baskets can be found in Appendix 2

Overall the premium paid for a healthy compared to an unhealthy shopping basket has increased since 1988 from 20 per cent to 35 per cent. It is striking that the cost of a healthy shopping basket has also increased by 49 per cent in the same period, while the cost for the unhealthy shopping basket increased by 33 per cent.

## The cost of healthy eating today

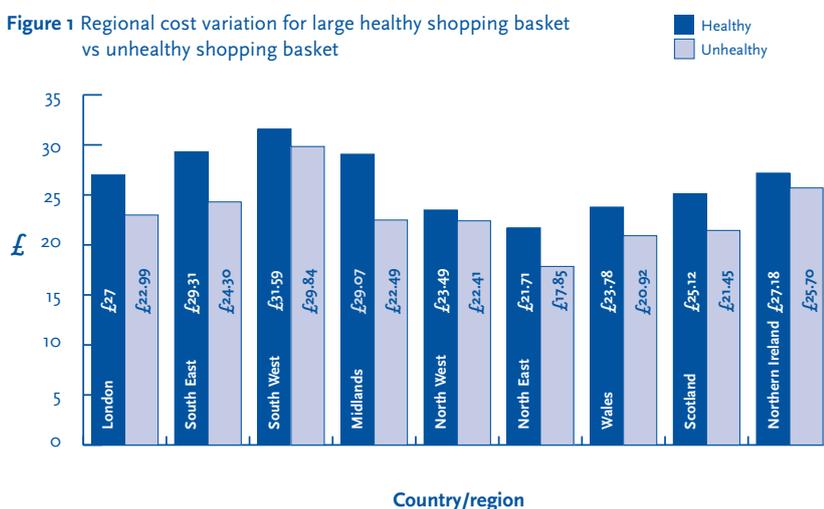
Building on this, the Food Commission extended the list of products that are considered healthy and unhealthy (see Appendix 3) to get a fuller picture of the cost of healthy eating compared to unhealthy eating today.

By doing so, it was established that the average healthy shopping basket cost was £25.69 compared to £22.29 for the equivalent, less healthy shopping basket. On average, the prices paid for the extended range of healthier items were 15 per cent above those paid for less healthy items.

## Regional costs of healthy eating

We also analysed the data for any regional variations and found a wide variation in the costs of healthy and unhealthy food. Overall, the healthier shopping baskets cost more in the South West, South East, Northern Ireland, London and the Midlands, ranging from £27 to £31.59. The lowest costs were found in the North East (£21.71), followed by the North West (£23.49), Wales (£23.78) and Scotland (£25.12).

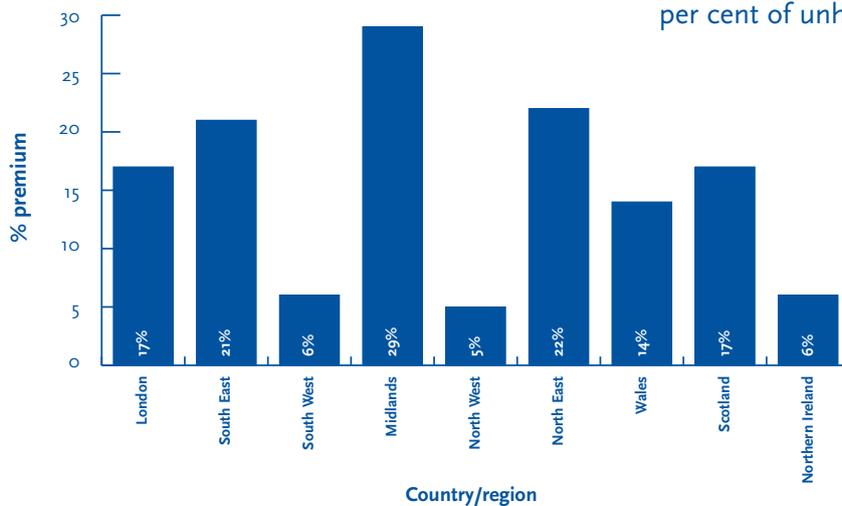
**Figure 1** Regional cost variation for large healthy shopping basket vs unhealthy shopping basket



## Regional healthy shopping basket premium

Comparing the average regional price of the healthy shopping basket with that of the unhealthy shopping basket shows that the highest premium for healthier food is in the Midlands. In contrast, the lowest premiums were found in the North West, South West and Northern Ireland, while more substantial premiums existed in the North East, the South East, London and Scotland (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Healthy shopping basket premium by country/region



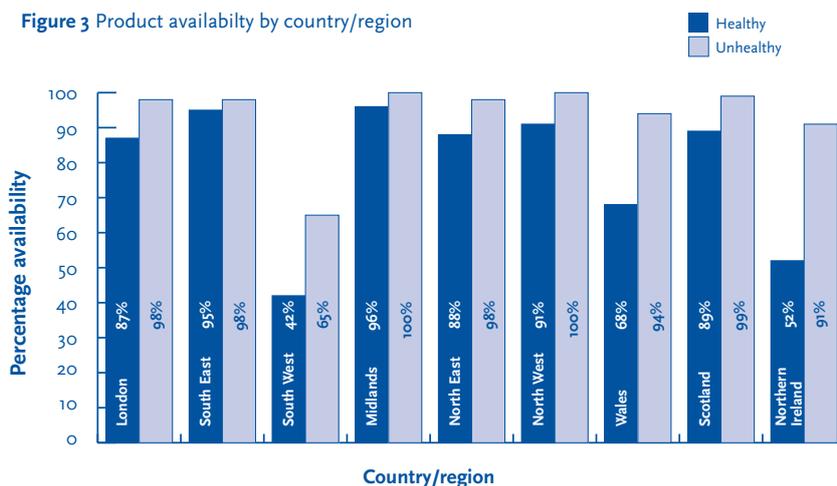
## Regional product availability

Regional analysis of available products shows that in all regions healthier products are less available than unhealthy ones (see Figure 3).

The lowest level of availability was found in the South West, Northern Ireland and Wales, and the highest in London, the North East, Scotland, the North West and the South East.

In some regions we found a considerable difference. For example, in Northern Ireland we recorded a 52 per cent availability of healthy products compared to 91 per cent for unhealthy products. In Wales 68 per cent of healthy products were available, compared to 94 per cent for less healthy ones. Similarly, in the South West our survey revealed a 42 per cent level of availability of healthy foods compared with 65 per cent of unhealthy products.

Figure 3 Product availability by country/region



## Availability of food categories

We divided the extended healthy and unhealthy baskets into different product categories to establish whether individual healthier products were harder to access than their less healthy alternatives. Here are the findings:

### Meat and fish products

Our data analysis highlighted that all healthier meat and fish products are far less available than similar unhealthy products (see Figure 4).

The lowest level of availability was for low-fat beef burgers when compared to full-fat beef burgers, with a difference of 47 per cent between

them, and this was followed by low-fat pork sausages compared to full-fat pork sausages, for which the difference in availability was 32 per cent.

The lowest difference in availability was for frozen cod steaks compared to fish fingers.

### Cereal products

This product category includes cereal products such as bread, rice, pasta and breakfast cereals. These were categorised as healthy or unhealthy according to their fibre content, low fibre being unhealthy and high fibre being healthy.

Figure 4 Meat and fish product availability

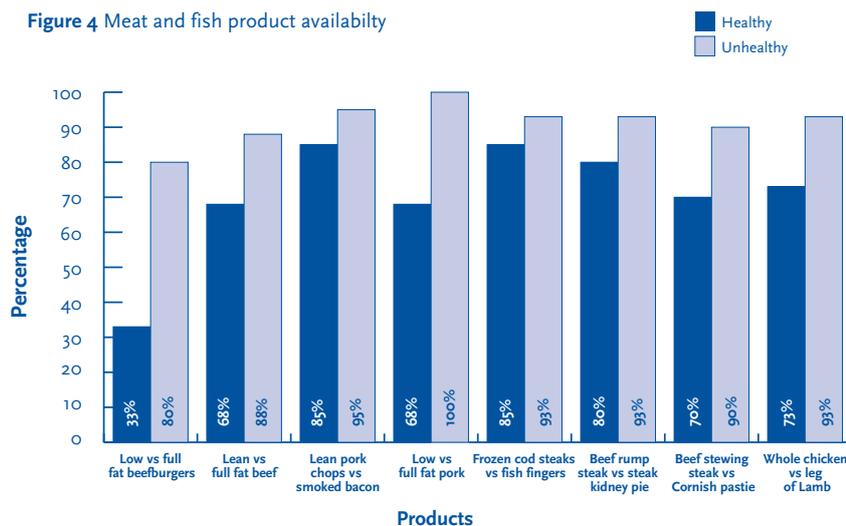
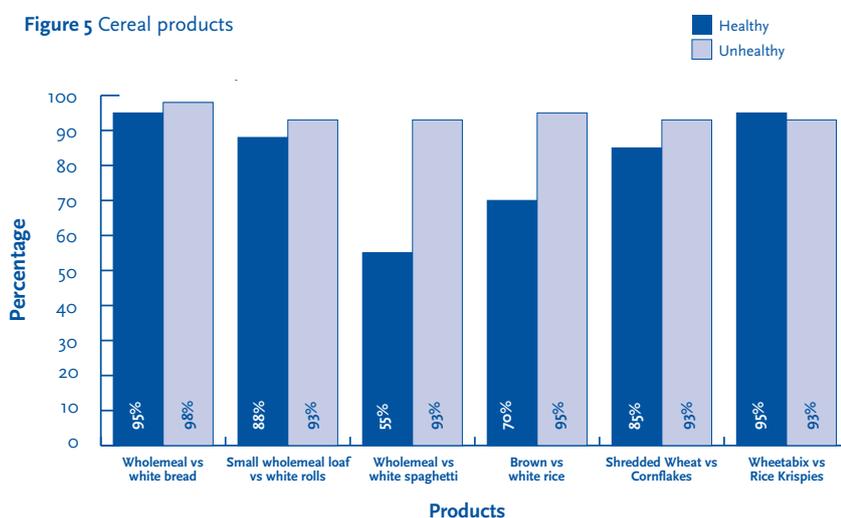


Figure 5 Cereal products



Again, across the product category healthier options were found to be less available than unhealthy options. The one exception was Weetabix when compared with Rice Krispies (see Figure 5).

The largest difference in availability was for wholemeal as opposed to white spaghetti with a lower availability of 38 per cent. Brown rice had a 25 per cent lower availability than white rice. Shredded Wheat had a lower availability than Cornflakes. Smaller percentage differences for availability were found for wholemeal compared to white bread and wholemeal compared to white rolls.

### Dairy products, spreads and oils

This category included everyday dairy products as well spreads, oils and cooking fat.

Apart from semi-skimmed compared to whole milk, all lower fat products had a lower percentage availability compared to the higher total and saturated fat products (see Figure 6). The largest difference was between low-fat cheddar when compared to full-fat cheddar. Low-fat sunflower margarine has a 10 per cent lower availability compared to soft margarine. Low-fat mayonnaise was available in 83 per cent of surveys compared to full-fat mayonnaise, which was available in 88 per cent, and vegetable oil was 93 per cent

available compared to lard, which was 95 per cent available.

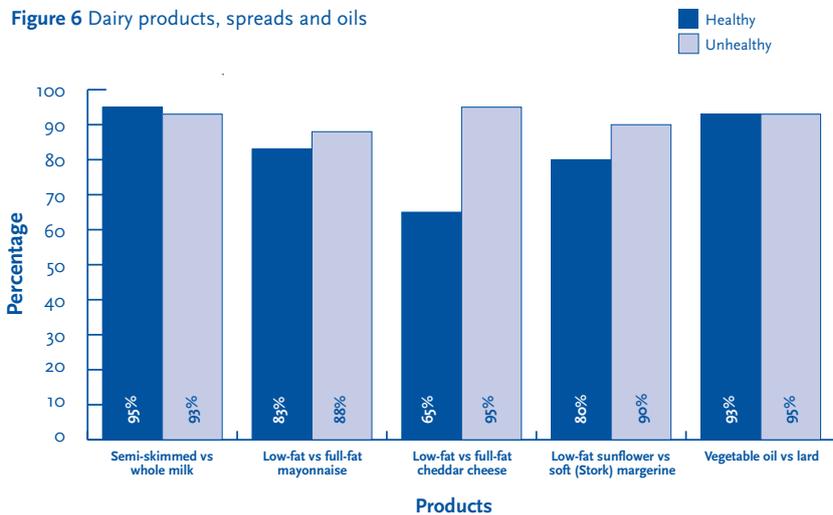
### Five-a-day products

Current Department of Health recommendations state that everyone should eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day, to reduce the risks of cancer and coronary heart disease and many other chronic diseases.<sup>1</sup> In addition to fresh fruit and vegetables, tinned, dried or juiced fruit and vegetables can contribute to the five-a-day portions.

As part of our research we analysed five-a-day products for availability. Some tinned products contain added sugar and/or salt. Such products, while contributing to the five-a-day, can also contribute significantly to salt intakes and are considered unhealthy in this survey.

Analysis of the data indicates that tinned peas with no added salt or sugar had the lowest availability compared to tinned peas with added salt and sugar – there was a significant 50 per cent difference in availability. Low salt/sugar baked beans were 70 per cent available in surveyed stores compared to baked beans with sugar and salt (95%). Tinned peaches in juice were 78 per cent available compared to tinned peaches in syrup (93%) and tinned tomatoes had the same level of availability as tomato soup (90%) (see Figure 7).

Figure 6 Dairy products, spreads and oils



## Basket of five-a-day products

The cost of a basket of five-a-day products (based on Department of Health recommendations) was also analysed for rural–urban variations (see Appendix 4 for products included in the shopping basket).

The average cost of a basket of fruit and vegetables in rural towns and villages was £9.70, compared to £7.01 in cities and towns.

The five-a-day shopping basket bought in a rural area therefore costs 38 per cent more than the same shopping basket purchased in an urban area.

## Availability of five-a-day products in rural and urban areas

Our survey found that all five-a-day products had a lower availability percentage in rural compared to urban areas (see Figure 8).

The lowest level of availability was for tinned peas without salt or sugar (11%) in rural areas compared to 43 per cent availability in urban areas. Low sugar/salt baked beans were only available in 56 per cent of surveys carried out, compared to 77 per cent availability of full sugar/salt baked beans.

Figure 7 Comparison of healthy vs unhealthy five-a-day product availability

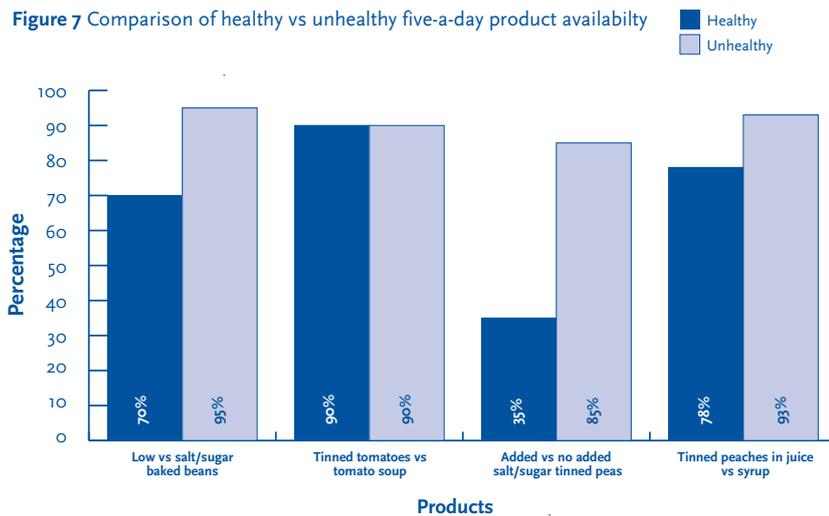
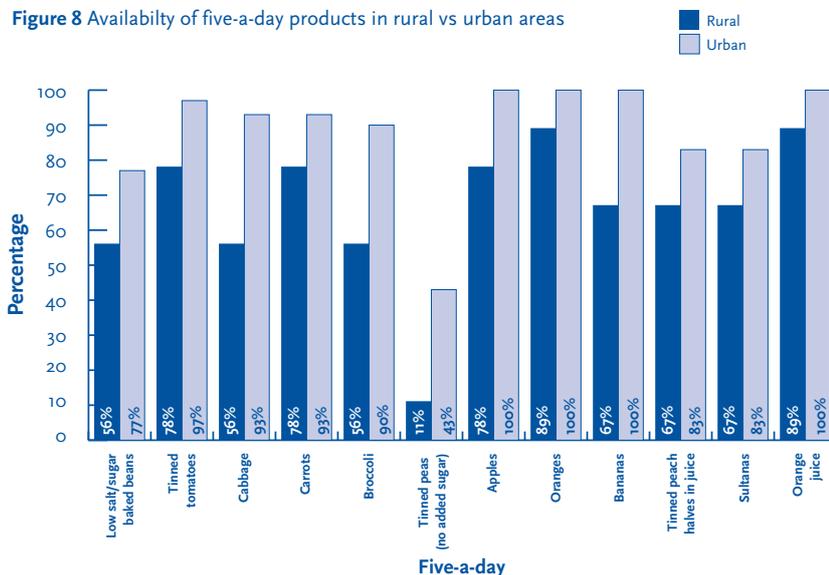


Figure 8 Availability of five-a-day products in rural vs urban areas



Cabbage, broccoli and low sugar/salt baked beans were only available in 56 per cent of all surveys carried out in rural areas, compared to 93 per cent, 90 per cent and 77 per cent respectively in urban surveys. Bananas, sultanas and tinned peach halves in juice were available in only 67 per cent of rural surveys compared to 100 per cent, 83 per cent and 83 per cent respectively in urban surveys. Apples, carrots and tinned tomatoes were only available in 78 per cent of rural surveys but were available in 100 per cent, 93 per cent and 97 per cent respectively of urban surveys. Finally, orange juice was available in 89 per cent of rural shopping basket surveys and available in all urban shopping basket surveys.

The cost of both healthy and unhealthy shopping baskets are more expensive in rural areas compared to urban areas. Those living in rural areas pay a 34 per cent premium for healthy food compared to urban areas (see Figure 9).

**Key findings**

From our survey we have found:

**It is harder to find healthier versions of basic foods, and healthier versions are more expensive.**

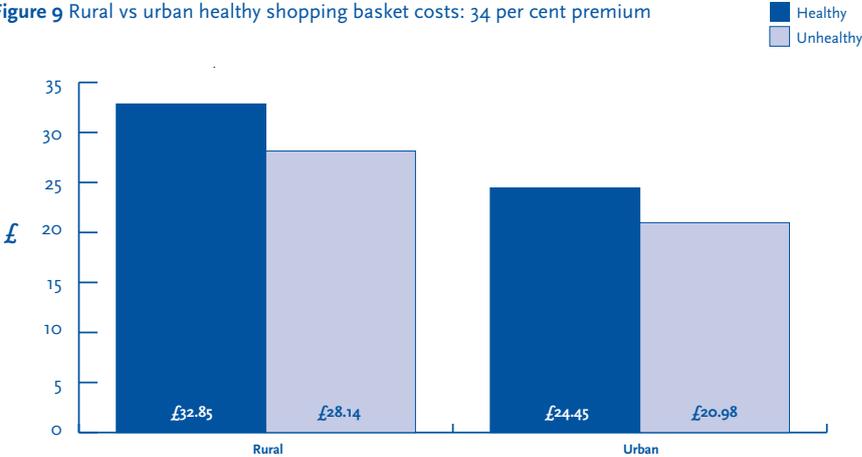
- Healthier versions of basic foods are harder to find in local shops, compared to less healthy foods.
- When available, the healthier foods typically cost 15 per cent more than less healthy versions.

Moreover, healthier versions of basic foods often carry a price premium – typically 40 per cent – thereby discouraging those on a tight budget from making healthy choices.

**There is regional variation.**

- In all regions and countries it is harder to find the healthier versions of food items.
- When available, a significantly higher price premium is paid for healthier food in the Midlands, North East and South East, compared to the South West, North West and Northern Ireland.

**Figure 9** Rural vs urban healthy shopping basket costs: 34 per cent premium



**If you live in a rural town or village it's even more expensive and more difficult to purchase a basket of healthier foods.**

- It's harder to find healthier foods in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- When available, healthier foods cost an extra 34 per cent in rural areas compared to urban areas.
- Fruit and vegetables represent a particular problem: it is harder to find products to meet your recommended 'five-a-day' if you live in rural areas.
- When available, 'five-a-day' items were typically 38 per cent more expensive in rural areas compared to urban areas.

**Chapter 2 endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Health website: [www.doh.gov.uk/fiveaday](http://www.doh.gov.uk/fiveaday)

# Chapter 3 The diets of families living on low incomes

This study broadly repeated one carried out by NCH in 1991.<sup>1</sup> Twelve years on and with national prosperity rising and healthy eating schemes underway, we have found that for those on the lowest incomes, the situation has not significantly changed. In some cases diets have got marginally better but many families are still not eating enough fruit and vegetables and other healthier foods because of cost.

Our research finds a close link between poor diet and income, with most parents stating they would buy healthier foods, including fruit and vegetables, if they had an extra £10 to spend on food. We found that some parents went short of food to feed other family members and a few even considered doing something illegal to get everyday basics.

Several households used their budgeting skills to cope with their situations. One mother reported she only bought vegetables in bulk when they were on special offer, using what she needed for that one meal and blanching and freezing the rest for later use. The same mother used a slow cooker to cook food as a way to save on gas bills. She could buy a £3.49 frozen chicken at the weekend, and provide her family of four with three cooked meals: a Sunday lunch, a chicken dinner and a chicken casserole.

Our survey asked parents about the kinds of food parents and children ate, as well as about their diet, access to food, their income and expenditure on food.

## Children’s diets

### Breakfasts and school meals

#### Do your children go to a breakfast club at school?

- Of the 26 school-aged children, only one child went to a breakfast club.

#### Do your children have school meals?

- Half of the 26 school-aged children did not have school meals.

### Why do they not have school meals?

- ‘[They] prefer packed lunch’*  
**Jane**, mother of one from the Midlands
- ‘Because they are quite fussy eaters’*  
**Lilly**, mother of two from the South West
- ‘School dinners are too expensive and I’m unsure of content, ie chips every day’*  
**Carole**, mother of two from the South East
- ‘[They] don’t like the variety of foods so therefore they were wasting school dinners and going hungry’*  
**Eileen**, mother of three from the North East

### Are they entitled to free school meals?

Fourteen out of 26 school-aged children were entitled to free school meals. Three of these did not take up the free school meals; only one respondent gave a reason:

- ‘They are fussy eaters so having sandwiches I know what they eat and they have what they like’*  
**Victoria**, mother of two from the Midlands

### What does your child usually drink at breakfast?

- 40 per cent of children had milk at breakfast.
- 15 had juice or squash.
- Two had nothing.

Response	Number (n=55)
Milk	22
Juice or squash	15
Milk and juice	8
Tea or coffee	4
Nothing	2
Water	3
Water and milk	1

### What does your child usually eat for breakfast?

- 83 per cent had breakfast cereal.
- Just under half ate white bread; only one child ate wholemeal bread.

Response (more than one item ticked)	Number (n=55)
Breakfast cereal	46
White bread	27
Wholemeal bread	1
No breakfast	2
Biscuits	2
Scrambled or boiled egg and toast	2
Fruit	1

### Does your child have cereal, toast or bread for breakfast most days?

- 50 parents said that their children had cereal, bread or toast for breakfast most days.
- One respondent said they could not afford it.

Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, they normally have this	50
Yes, but not so often	1
He/she doesn't like it	1
I can't afford it	1

## Food types

### Does your child eat brown or wholemeal bread most days?

- Just over half did not eat wholemeal or brown bread.

### Table 5 Does your child eat brown or wholemeal bread most days?

Response	Number (n=51)
Yes, they usually have this	5
Yes, but not so often	20
My child does not like it	9
This is not something we eat	14
I can't afford to buy it	3

### Does your child eat breaded chicken, chicken nuggets, burgers, meat pies, sausages and other processed meats at least four times a week?

- 90 per cent ate processed meat products, and over half had them four times or more a week.

*'I try to limit the amount of red meat and salt in the meals – not easy when you're on a tight budget.'*

Jill, mother of two from the South East

### Table 6 Does your child eat processed meat products four times a week?

Response	Number (n=52)
Yes, they usually have this	28
Yes, but not so often	19
My child does not like it	1
This is not something we eat	4

### Does your child eat lean and unprocessed meat and fish four times a week?

- 24 parents said their children had unprocessed meat and fish less than four times a week.
- 10 of these did not eat unprocessed meat or fish products at all, seven of whom said this was because they could not afford it.

Table 7 Does your child eat lean and unprocessed meat and fish four times a week?	
Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, they usually have this	19
Yes, but not so often	24
My child does not like it	2
This is not something we eat	1
I can't afford it	7

#### Does your child eat starchy staples (potatoes, plantain, cassava), rice or pasta most days?

- More than 90 per cent stated that their children ate starchy staples.

Table 8 Does your child eat starchy staples most days?	
Response	Number (n=54)
Yes, they usually have this	35
Yes, but not so often	15
My child does not like it	2
I can't afford it	2

#### Does your child have peas, lentils or baked beans more than twice a week?

- Nine out of 10 children ate pulses more than twice a week.
- One respondent said they could not afford to buy them.

*'[They have this] all the time, they are cheap.'*

**Eileen**, mother of three from the North East

#### Does your child eat green vegetables or salads most days?

- 15 parents stated that their children did not eat green vegetables or salads at all.
- Five parents said it was because they could not afford it.

Table 9 Does your child eat green vegetables or salads most days?	
Response	Number (n=54)
Yes, they usually have this	19
Yes, but not so often	20
My child does not like it	9
This isn't something we eat	1
I can't afford it	5

#### Does your child have takeaway or fast food several days a week?

- Nearly 40 per cent of parents said their children ate takeaway or fast food; two families had takeaway food several days a week.
- Over a quarter said their children did not eat it because they could not afford to buy it.

Table 10 Does your child eat takeaway or fast food several days a week?	
Response	Number (n=49)
Yes, they usually have this	2
Yes, but not so often	17
My child does not like it	1
This isn't something we eat	16
I can't afford it	13

#### Does your child eat fruit most days?

- Over a third of parents stated that their children ate fruit occasionally.
- Five parents stated their children ate no fruit at all, and two parents said they could not afford to buy fruit.

Table 11 Does your child eat fresh fruit most days?	
Response	Number (n=52)
Yes, they usually have this	34
Yes, but not so often	13
My child does not like it	3
I can't afford it	2

### Does your child eat chocolate or sweets most days?

- 89 per cent of parents stated their children ate sweets or chocolate and of these 28 per cent said they ate them most days.
- Two parents said their children did not eat chocolate because they could not afford to buy it.

Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, they usually have this	15
Yes, but not so often	32
My child does not like it	1
This is not something we eat	3
I can't afford it	2

### Does your child have soft drinks such as squash, fizzy drinks, milk shakes or other soft drinks?

- 82 per cent said their children drank soft drinks.
- 47 per cent of children drank soft drinks every day.
- 14 parents reported that their children had consumed soft drinks in the previous 24 hours.
- Of these, three children consumed diet soft drinks.
- The remaining 11 children had an average of two cans or glasses of sugary soft drinks in the previous 24 hours.
- Of those children drinking sugary drinks, four were two years old, three were three years old, two were four years old, one was six years old and one was nine years old.

Response	Number (n=51)
Yes, they usually have this	24
Yes, but not so often	18
My child does not like it	1
This is not something we drink	7
I can't afford it	1

### Parents comments on their child's soft drink intake:

*'[My child has] plain water or milk'*  
**Ruby**, mother of three from the North East

*'We usually have fruit juices'*  
**Jane**, mother of one from the North East

*'The children prefer milk'*  
**Jemma**, mother of six from the South East

*'My child only has pure juices and milkshakes and water'*  
**Eileen**, mother of three from the North East

*'Juice and milk when she wants it'*  
**Lucy**, mother of one from the South East

### Does your child eat crisps or other savoury snacks most days?

- Nine in 10 children ate crisps or other savoury snacks.
- 21 parents reported that their children ate crisps on most days. Of these 21 children who ate crisps most days, 13 were between one and three years old, six were between four and six years old and two were nine years old.

Response	Number (n=52)
Yes, they usually have this	21
Yes, but not so often	27
This is not something we eat	4

## Food purchasing decisions

### Are you able to give your child the kind of food you want to?

- 51 parents answered the question, of whom 29 per cent said they were not able to give their children the sort of food they wanted to.
- Seven stated this was because they could not afford it.
- Nine said they couldn't give it to their children because they would not eat it:

*'My children won't eat salads and veg that I'd like them to eat'*

**Ruby**, mother of three from the North East

*'The cost of fresh fruit and veg is too expensive. Decent lean meat is also expensive.'*

**Jane**, mother of two from the South East

### Has there been any day in the last month when you have felt that your child has not had enough to eat?

- 23 parents felt that their child had not had enough to eat some time in the last month.

**Table 15** Has there been any day in the last month when you have felt that your child has not had enough to eat?

Response	Number (n=52)
Yes	23
<b>Reasons given:</b>	
Child was ill	13
Not enough money for food	2
Children are fussy eaters	3
Child teething	1

### If you had an extra £10 to spend on food for your child, what foods would you like to buy?

- Only two parents said they would give their children the same or that they did not need extra money for food:

*'Nothing extra, she eats what we eat which is healthy'*

**Judith**, mother of two from the South West

- 44 parents said if they had an extra £10 to spend on food they would buy more food, indicating that they do not have enough money to buy the food they would like for their children.
- 41 of these parents named a specific food they would buy if they had more money, of whom 36 said they would give their children healthy food. Only five out of 41 said they would give their children foods that were high in salt, sugar or fat.

**Table 16** If you had an extra £10 to spend on food for your child, what would you spend it on?

Response (more than one item ticked)	Number (n=41)
Meat (two specified Sunday roasts)	19
Fruit (two specified 'exotic varieties')	26
Fruit juice	2
Vegetables	20
Pasta/rice	3
Cheese	3
Eggs	1
Milk	1
Yoghurt	2
Cake	1
Organic food	2
'Healthy food'	2
Crisps	1
Tinned food	1
Croissants	1
Takeaway/fast food	1

### Details of foods parents would buy more of if they could afford it:

*'Treat my child to food he likes but not able to buy usually'*

**Nadia**, mother of one from the South West

*'More fruit and veg and less processed foods'*

**Jill**, mother of two from the South East

*'Fresh fruit and veg, different bread, ie croissants, a variety of different foods'*

**Jane**, mother of three from the South West

*'More fruit and veg like strawberries, raspberries, peppers and avocado'*

**Eileen**, mother of one from the South East

*'Better chicken nuggets than the cheap make – different shaped potato snacks such as smiley faces and waffles etc, more different types of cereals'*

**Rachel**, mother of two from the North East

**What is the best home cooked meal you like to cook for you and your family?**

- The most popular meal cooked for their family was Sunday roast, followed by pasta dishes. This was stated by 26 of the respondents.

## Children's food marketing

- 70 per cent of parents took their children shopping with them.
- Five children were one year old or younger and therefore too young to ask for particular foods.
- Of the remaining 35 respondents, 26 said that their children pestered them to buy certain foods and drinks when they took them shopping.

**Where are the products placed that cause your children to pester you the most?**

- 45 parents said that their children pestered them for products when shopping.
- 93 per cent of these parents said their children pestered them for products within a child's reach.
- Of these more than half said their children pestered them for products that were at their child's head level.

- Eight parents said their children pestered them for products that were located at the checkout.
- Six parents said their children pestered them for products that were at aisle ends, near the floor or in big display bins.
- One parent commented that their child pestered them for products that were *'anywhere he'll find them'*  
**Zena**, mother of one from the North East
- One parent said their child pestered them for products that were out of children's reach.

**Which products do your children pester you for?**

- 25 parents specified the foods their children requested.
- Parents gave details of 42 foods that were requested by the children, 80 per cent were foods that were high in salt, sugar, fat and/or saturated fat. These included chocolate, crisps, sweets and soft drinks.
- 11 of the healthier products that were asked for included still water, fruit and vegetables.
- Other products the children requested included any products with Bob the Builder or Tweenies on the packaging; three respondents said their children asked for *'advertised foods'*.
- Non-food items that children pestered for during the shopping trip included toys and magazines (n=5) and one respondent said, *'It isn't food, it's the rides'*  
**Della**, mother of two from the North West
- 36 parents believed that their children were encouraged to ask for certain foods by television advertising, packaging and free toys.  
*'Sometimes if I feel under pressure I buy food that they only want because it looks good on packaging'*  
**Teena**, mother of eight from the North East

*'To keep her quiet, I feel bad because I want her to have the same as others'*

**Jane**, mother of three from the North East

*'I buy these items for my child, as otherwise she will have a temper tantrum and scream. It is easier to give in to her, for a peaceful life!'*

**Jane**, mother of five from Wales

## Parent's diets

### Breakfast

#### What do you drink and eat for breakfast?

- 24 parents had no breakfast.
- Of these, eight had nothing to drink either.
- 16 had only tea or coffee and no food.
- Nine of these had sugary tea or coffee, having an average of two teaspoons of sugar per cup.

*'By the time I have sorted the kids out there is no time left'*

**Diane**, mother of three from the North West

*'Because I haven't enough time'*

**Ruby**, mother of three from the North West

*'Makes me feel ill, the thought of eating first thing'*

**Eileen**, mother of one from the South East

**Table 17 What parents drink and eat for breakfast**

Response (more than one item ticked)	Number (n=55)
Ate nothing	24
Ate and drank nothing	8
Had tea or coffee only	16
Had tea/coffee with sugar	9
Biscuits	3
White bread	13
Wholemeal bread (with cooked breakfast, see below)	1
High-sugar breakfast cereal	10
Low-sugar breakfast cereal	5
Juice or squash	8
Water	7
Milk	3
Cooked breakfast	1
Grapefruit	1
Yoghurt	1

#### Do you eat cereal, toast or bread for breakfast?

- 38 said they ate these foods for breakfast; 21 of them ate them most days.
- Three parents said they did not eat it because they could not afford it.

**Table 18 Do parents eat cereal, toast or bread for breakfast?**

Response	Number (n=51)
Yes, I normally have this	21
Yes, but not so often	17
I don't like it	2
It isn't something I eat	8
I can't afford it	3

## Other food choices

### Do you eat brown or wholemeal bread most days?

- 24 parents said they did not eat brown or wholemeal bread; four of these respondents said they could not afford it.

Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, I normally have this	8
Yes, but not so often	21
I don't like it	6
It isn't something I eat	14
I can't afford it	4

### Do you eat processed meats like breaded chicken, chicken nuggets, burgers, meat pies, sausages and other processed meats at least four times a week?

- 78 per cent ate processed meat.
- 33 per cent ate processed meat products at least four times a week.

### Do you eat fresh, lean meat or fish (without a coating) at least four times a week?

- 42 per cent had fresh, lean meat or fish less than four times a week.
- 22 per cent did not eat any fresh, lean meat or fish; eight respondents said this was because they could not afford it.

Response	Number (n=55)
Yes, I normally have this	20
Yes, but not so often	23
I don't like it	2
It isn't something I eat	2
I can't afford it	8

### Do you eat starchy vegetables, rice or pasta most days?

- 91 per cent ate starchy foods; 62 per cent ate them most days.

Response	Number (n=55)
Yes, I normally have this	34
Yes, but not so often	16
I don't like it	2
It isn't something I eat	1
I can't afford it	2

### Do you eat pulses including beans, peas, lentils or baked beans more than twice a week?

- 93 per cent of respondents ate pulses and 65 per cent ate them most days.

### Do you eat green vegetables or salads most days?

- Only half of parents stated they ate vegetables most days.
- A quarter of the parents stated they did not eat green vegetables or salads at all.

Response	Number (n=55)
Yes, I normally have this	28
Yes, but not so often	13
I don't like it	2
It isn't something I eat	9
I can't afford it	3

### Do you eat takeaway or fast food several days a week?

- Nearly half of parents commented that they ate this food and 10 per cent ate it several days a week.
- 27 per cent said they did not eat takeaway food because they couldn't afford it.

**Table 23 Do parents eat takeaway or fast food several days a week?**

Response	Number (n=51)
Yes, I normally have this	5
Yes, but not so often	20
I don't like it	3
It isn't something I eat	9
I can't afford it	14

#### Do you eat fresh fruit most days?

- 24 per cent of parents ate no fruit at all, of whom five said they could not afford to buy it.
- Only 44 per cent of parents said that they ate fruit most days.

**Table 24 Do parents eat fruit most days?**

Response	Number (n=55)
Yes, I normally have this	24
Yes, but not so often	18
I don't like it	3
It isn't something I eat	5
I can't afford it	5

#### Do you eat sweets or chocolate most days?

- Over half of parents said they ate sweets or chocolate and 17 per cent ate them most days.

**Table 25 Do parents eat sweets or chocolates most days?**

Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, I normally have this	9
Yes, but not so often	20
I don't like it	8
It isn't something I eat	12
I can't afford it	4

#### Do you eat crisps or savoury snacks most days?

- 79 per cent ate crisps.
- 27 per cent ate them most days.

**Table 26 Do parents eat crisps or savoury snacks most days?**

Response	Number (n=53)
Yes, I normally have this	14
Yes, but not so often	27
I don't like it	3
It isn't something I eat	8
I can't afford it	1

#### Do you drink soft drinks such as squash, fizzy drinks or milk shakes?

- 70 per cent of respondents drank sugary soft drinks.
- 42 per cent drank them most days.
- Of those who gave details of their soft drink intake, an average of two bottles or cans of sugary soft drinks were consumed in the previous 24 hours. The lowest was one can or bottle and the highest was five cans or bottles.

#### Parent's fruit intake compared to their children

- 16 per cent of parents did not eat fruit although their children ate fruit regularly.
- Of these, four parents said they could not afford to eat fruit themselves but could afford to buy it for their children so they could eat fruit regularly.
- 22 per cent of the whole sample gave their children fruit most days, while they ate it less often themselves.
- One parent could not afford to buy fruit for either themselves or their child.
- Two parents said their children ate fruit regularly but that they themselves did not like fruit.

## Food satisfaction

Looking at the food you buy and eat, overall are you happy or unhappy?

- Over half (n=31) said they were happy with the food they buy and eat. Of these eight said they were very happy while 23 said they were happy.
- 27 per cent said they were neither happy nor unhappy with the food they ate.
- 15 per cent said they were unhappy with the food they bought and ate; of these one respondent was very unhappy.

*'I would like to buy good brands of food and not so much junk food'*

**Eileen**, mother of three from the North East

*'I would dearly love to be able to afford more fresh fruit and vegetables and less processed food products'*

**Jill**, mother of two from the South East

*'[I am] unable to cook'*

**Rebecca**, mother of a four year old from the North East

Those who were unhappy stated this was because:

- of the cost of the food (12 respondents)
- they could not eat the foods they would like to choose (seven respondents)
- the foods they ate were unhealthy (three respondents)
- the foods they ate were boring (three respondents)

## Going without food

Have you gone without food to meet the needs of someone else in your family?

- 54 parents answered this question.
- 46 per cent stated that they had gone without food to meet the needs of someone else in their family.

- Of these respondents three-quarters had gone without food in the last month.
- Three went without food between three to four times a week.
- Five went without food in the last week.
- Six went without food in the last couple of weeks.
- Six had gone without food in the last month.
- 14 had gone without food in the last year.

*'My children are looked after very well, fed and clean and clothed. If I leave anyone out it's me.'*

**Cathy**, mother of four from the South East

## Why have you gone without food?

- 18 parents answered this question.
- Of these 15 said they had not had enough money.
- Two said they had been ill and one said they did not like the food.

## Economic concerns

We asked whether respondents were employed or on income support.

- 53 parents answered this question.
- 21 parents were in employment.
- 32 depended on income support.

## Income source

*'I think people on low incomes who are employed are in the worse position as expectations are higher from others. If you say you don't work, less is expected of you materially.'*

**Clare**, mother of three from the South West

	Employed	Income support
Number in sample	21	32
Percentage of sample	40	60
Average family size	4	3.4
Average income	£265.10	£129.72
Average expenditure on food	£63.68	£58.06
Average % expenditure on food	24%	45%
Average expenditure on food per person per week	£16.12	£17.08

## Food spending

- 13 out of 21 employed respondents provided full details and the average that they spent on food from their total income was 24 per cent.
- 27 out of 31 respondents on income support provided full income details and spending on shopping; the average expenditure on food was 45 per cent.
- In this survey the average amount spent on food per person was £16.07 per week, equating to £2.29 per person per day.
- Of the 32 families living on income from employment, the average spent on food per week, per person was £16.12; the highest was £40 and the lowest was £6.25.
- For those families (n=20) on income support the average amount spent per person, per week was £17.08; the highest was £35 and the lowest was £6.66.

*'I think that the government should raise income support allowance as it is impossible for families to live healthily and substantially on the amount I receive'*

**Lauren**, mother of a three year old, Wales

## Debt and desperation

Eighteen employed respondents and 28 respondents on income support answered questions about being behind with bill payments and whether they had considered doing anything illegal because they were so desperate for money.

### Are you behind with bill payments?

- 43 per cent said they were behind with bill payments.
- Seven employed respondents were behind with bill payments compared to 11 who were on income support.
- Within the group of 28 parents giving details of how long they had been on benefits, those who were on benefits the longest were more likely to be in debt.

Out of those on income support, five respondents said they had been so desperate for money they had considered doing something illegal to get it.

### We asked what they had been so desperate to buy that they had considered doing something illegal:

*'Food and clothes'*

**Zena**, mother of one from the North East

*'Cost of living'*

**Rachel**, mother of one from the North West

*'To feed my child'*

**Eileen**, mother of three from the North East

*'Clothing'*

**Sacha**, mother of one from Wales

Three of the five who answered the question had also specified how long they had been on benefits: two had been on benefits for between two and five years, one had been on benefits for over five years.

### Do you or your children ever go without anything because you can't afford it?

- 54 parents answered this question.
- Just over half (n=28) of the respondents said that they sometimes went without because of lack of money.
- 14 out of 54 said that they and their children both went without.
- 12 out of 54 said that neither of them went without.
- No one reported that only their child went without.

### If so, what do you go without?

	Number (n=116)
Parent's shoes or clothes	29
Holidays	28
Trips out	25
Food for parents	13
Children's clothes or shoes	5
Heating	4
Toys	4
Children's food	4
Sports and fitness	4

*'Sometimes I miss bills'*

**Jane**, mother of one from the North East

*'I go without nights out'*

**Kathleen**, mother of one from the North West

## Shopping

### How often do you shop for food?

- Four shopped less than once a week.
- 21 shopped once a week.
- A third (n=18) shopped two to three times a week.

- 12 shopped four or more times a week.

### When comparing urban and rural respondents:

- 57 per cent of families in rural areas went shopping once a week or less often, compared to 38 per cent in urban areas.
- 24 per cent of those living in urban areas were able to shop four or more times a week, compared to only 14 per cent of those living in rural areas.

*'I cannot afford to do a big weekly shop'*

**Laura**, mother of one from Wales

How often do you shop for food?	All (n=55)	Urban % (n=34)	Rural % (n=21)
Less than once a week	4	6 (2)	9 (2)
Once a week	21	33 (11)	48 (10)
2-3 times a week	18	35 (12)	29 (6)
4-6 times a week	6	6 (2)	14 (3)
Every day	6	18 (6)	0

### Where do you usually shop?

Out of 54 who answered the question:

- 42 shopped at big supermarkets
- 12 shopped at small supermarkets
- Four shopped at small local general stores, three shopped at greengrocers, two shopped at butchers, one shopped at a bakers and two shopped at a market
- Nine of the parents shopped at more than one retailer. Most (n=7) shopped at big supermarkets and either small supermarkets, small local general stores, greengrocers, butchers, bakers or street markets. One shopped at a small supermarket and a greengrocer, one shopped at a greengrocers, butchers and market

*'I support local shops but they're so expensive, so I do most shopping at big supermarkets and top up in the village'*  
**Jessie**, mother of two from the South West

### Why do you do your main shop there?

The main reason given for shopping at these retailers were:

- cheapness
- good quality food
- able to buy the sort of food they wanted
- easy to get to

### If you are unhappy about the food where you shop, why are you unhappy?

Twenty-three indicated that they were unhappy about the food where they shopped. The reasons given were:

- expensive
- lack of choice
- poor quality food

## Distance and transport

### How far do you go to do most of your food shopping?

- 70 per cent had to travel more than half a mile to do most of their food shopping.
- More than a third of the total sample (n=19) had to travel more than two miles.
- 11 of those who had to travel more than half a mile to get food relied on friends or family to take them by car. Three of them used taxis when a lift was not available.

**Table 30 Distance travelled for food shop**

How far?	<0.5 mile	0.5 to 2 miles	>2 miles
Walk	11	4	1
Bus	1	2	
Own car	2	5	9
Friend's car		4	4
Taxi		3	
Walk there, taxi back	1	2	1
Taxi and bus		1	1
Taxi and friend's car			3

## Transport

- The average journey cost was £3.71. Compared to the average weekly spend on food, this represents an additional 23 per cent on top of the cost of their shopping.
- 68 per cent of those living in rural areas (13 out of 19) reported a journey cost, compared to 27 per cent of those living in urban areas (10 out of 36).
- 57 per cent in rural areas had to travel more than two miles to get to a supermarket, compared to 19 per cent (n=7) in urban areas.
- Three of those living in rural areas travelled less than half a mile to shop compared to 12 in urban areas.

**Table 31 Journey distance to shops: rural vs urban**

	<0.5 miles	0.5–2 miles	>2 miles
Rural (n=21)	10% (2)	33% (7)	57% (12)
Urban (n=34)	38% (13)	41% (14)	21% (7)

## Affordability

### Do you have enough money for food?

- 54 parents answered this question.
- 20 per cent said they did not have enough money for food.
- 40 per cent said they just about had enough money.
- 40 per cent said they had enough money for food.

*'I am struggling to manage as a single parent and full-time student'*

**Nadia**, mother of a six year old from the South West

*'All the good food is too expensive so I buy cheap brands'*

**Rebecca**, mother of a four year old from the North East

*'I am on benefits and sometimes find it hard'*

**Jane**, mother of one from from the North East

### What would you eat more of if you could afford it?

- 63 per cent said there were foods they would eat more of if they could afford it. The most commonly identified foods were fruit and fruit juices, fresh meat and vegetables.

*'More different fruit and veg rather than the basic'*

**Teena**, mother of eight from the North East

*'Chicken dinner, more meat as this is expensive'*

**Kathleen**, mother of one from the North West

## Key findings of the questionnaire

The diets of children and families on low incomes today do not show substantial improvements compared to those found in 1991.

### Comparing the findings of the 2003 survey with those from the survey in 1991:

- 40 per cent of children in our 1991 survey ate green vegetables or salad most days compared to 35 per cent in the 2003 research.
- The proportion of children eating fruit most days increased from 51 per cent in 1991 to 65 per cent in 2003.
- However, those who were eating neither fruit nor green vegetables most days increased from 24 per cent in 1991 to 31 per cent in 2003.
- The proportion of parents eating green vegetables or salads most days rose from 44 per cent in 1991 to 51 per cent in 2003, but the proportion who ate no fruit or green vegetables most days increased from 32 per cent in 1991 to 37 per cent in 2003.

**Note:** The survey samples in 1991 and 2003 were different in some respects, for example there were more employed participants in the more recent survey compared to the earlier one. For this reason these comparisons should be viewed as indicative, not conclusive.

## Children's diets in 2003

- **Vegetables:** 37 per cent ate green vegetables or salad only occasionally and 28 per cent never ate green vegetables or salad.
- **Fruit:** most children ate fruit, but 25 per cent ate fruit only occasionally and a further 10 per cent never ate fruit. Only one child in 55 ate fruit for breakfast.
- **Fatty meats:** consumed by 90 per cent of children and eaten four or more days a week by 54 per cent.
- **Bread:** 27 children in the survey ate bread for breakfast and of these only one child ate wholemeal bread.

- **Sweets and chocolate:** consumed by 90 per cent of children, with 17 per cent eating them every day.
- **Sugary drinks:** consumed by 82 per cent with nearly 50 per cent drinking them most days.
- **Crisps:** consumed by 93 per cent, with 43 per cent eating them most days.

### Children's food marketing

- Eight out of 10 parents said their children were encouraged to ask for certain foods by television advertising, packaging and free toys.
- 45 out of 55 parents said that their children pestered them to buy products when they were shopping.
- 80 per cent of the products that children asked for were high in fat, saturated fat, sugar and/or salt.

### Parent's diets in 2003

- **Vegetables:** 25 per cent ate no green vegetables or salad; three parents said they could not afford to do so.
- **Fruit:** 24 per cent ate no fruit at all, five parents said they could not afford to do so.
- **Meat and fish:** 80 per cent ate processed meat and fish and of these 33 per cent ate it four or more times a week.
- **Bread:** 13 parents had bread for breakfast, but only one of these had wholemeal bread. Nearly half of adults asked did not eat wholemeal bread at all.
- **Sweets and chocolate:** consumed by 54 per cent, 17 per cent of whom ate them most days.
- **Sugary drinks:** consumed by 72 per cent, 43 per cent of whom drank them most days.
- **Crisps:** consumed by 79 per cent, of whom 27 per cent ate them most days.

### Cost of living

- In this survey the average amount spent on food per person was £16.07 per week, equating to £2.29 per day.
- Families in this survey with one or more employed adults and two children spent an average of £50.71 on food each week. The minimum amount needed to provide such a family with a low-cost but adequate diet has been calculated at £62.84. Based on our findings families in this survey have a shortfall of £12.13 in their shopping budget and are therefore unlikely to be eating an adequate diet.<sup>2</sup>
- 20 per cent of families said they did not have enough money for food and a further 40 per cent said they only just had enough money for food.
- Of those on income support (n=32) five respondents said they had been so desperate for money they had considered doing something illegal. They said the things they had been so desperate to buy included food, clothes, and 'food for my child'.
- Over half the families went without at least one of the following because of lack of money: heating, food for themselves or their children, clothes or shoes for themselves or their children, toys, trips out and holidays.
- 40 per cent said they were behind with bill payments or in debt.

### Access

- Of the 55 families, 40 (78 per cent) had to travel more than half a mile to do most of their food shopping and just under half of these had to travel more than two miles.
- The average journey cost was £3.71.
- Travel costs represented an additional 23 per cent on the average shopping cost.
- In rural areas two-thirds had to travel more than two miles to buy food compared to one-fifth in urban areas.

- Over half (57%) of rural families went shopping once or less than once a week, compared to 38 per cent of urban families. Shopping less often is likely to have a negative impact on the amount of fruit and vegetables bought.

### Chapter 3 endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Poverty and Nutrition Survey; The difficulties of providing an adequate diet for families on benefits, 1991, NCH.

<sup>2</sup> Parker, H, (ed) (2002) Low Cost But Acceptable: A minimum income standard for working households with children living in Swansea, South Wales, Family Budget Unit, National Centre for Public Policy University of Wales and Unison Cymru

## Chapter 4 Recommendations

Action is needed nationally, regionally and locally to tackle the combination of factors responsible for the unhealthy diets of many children living in families on low incomes today. In most respects we know the policies that are required: all that is missing is the political will and public support to implement them.

- The government must develop a national strategy and action plan for ending food poverty as central components of its drives to improve public health and end child poverty.
- Social security benefits, including income support, should contain an explicit food element. For families this should be set in line with an objective assessment of how much it costs to provide a nutritionally adequate diet for parents and children. We support the Zacchaeus 2000 call for minimum income standards to be incorporated into the setting of income support and the minimum wage.
- The ability of children to eat healthily and well should be part of the basket of measures used to track the government's progress in ending child poverty.
- The government should reform the Social Fund so most loans to pay for essential items are replaced with grants: at present the repayment of debts significantly reduces the food budgets of many families on low incomes.
- The government should develop measures for increasing the access to healthy and affordable food of children and families on low incomes, especially those living in the countryside, as part of its broader strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. Free or subsidised transport schemes to supermarkets are shown to be helpful: many more are needed.
- Within the Children Bill now going through parliament, one of the five outcomes to which all children's services are required to work in England is that of 'being healthy'. Government guidance must explain that 'being healthy' includes 'eating healthily' and detail what this must mean in practice.
- All children's services in local areas should be required to promote healthy eating and their performance in this regard must be measured through the integrated inspection framework that the government is currently developing.
- The national service framework for children's health (The 'Children's NSF') that the government is developing in England must include one or more specific standards about children's healthy eating. It must place specific duties on primary care trusts (PCTs) and others to take action to promote this in local areas, particularly for children living in families on low incomes.
- The government's Healthy Start Scheme that gives extra money to pregnant women and to mothers of children in their first year of life to help them eat healthily should be upgraded to better reflect the extra costs of eating well, and extended to all mothers of under-fives.
- The food manufacturers and retailers should work with the Food Standards Agency to:
  1. reduce the levels of salt, sugar and fat in foods aimed at children
  2. improve food labelling so children and families can make informed choices about the foods they purchase and eat
  3. remove snacks and sweets from supermarket checkouts
  4. use sponsorship and repeat promotions only for healthier foods
- The Food Standards Agency is due to publish best practice with regard to these initiatives in March 2005. If the food industry and retailers do not comply with these measures within a further two years the government should take steps to regulate.
- The government should review its current initiatives aimed at promoting healthy eating among children, including breakfast clubs and fruit in school. More funding should be invested in those proven to be most effective.

- The secondary school curriculum should be reviewed to ensure that children are given adequate opportunities to learn basic cooking skills.
- All school meals should abide by minimum nutritional standards: the Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (England) Regulations 2000 do not go far enough and must be toughened up.
- Schools should give a consistent healthy eating message with only healthy foods promoted on school premises. Water should be freely available and vending machines should provide only healthy foods and drinks.

# Appendix 1 Methodology

## 1. Shopping basket survey

### Shopping list design

The basket of foods was designed to include 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' versions of basic food items, matching less healthy versions against similar healthier alternatives. Items were selected to ensure that overall dietary patterns would not be dramatically affected, eg regular beef mince was matched against a low-fat version of beef mince, white rice was matched against brown rice and orange squash was matched against orange juice. An additional range of goods was included that could contribute to the 'five-a-day' fruit and vegetable intake recommended for healthy eating. Details of the contents of the shopping basket are shown in Appendices 2–4.

Products were chosen for each criteria based on their total fat, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium content, based on guidelines from the Food Standards Agency. Products that were high in total fat, saturated fat, sugar and/or sodium were considered 'unhealthy'. Conversely, products that were low in these components were deemed 'healthy'. In addition to the above nutritional criteria, refined cereal products with a low fibre content were deemed unhealthy, compared to their high-fibre alternatives (for example, white bread was matched with wholemeal bread).

Those carrying out the surveys were asked to record the cheapest available product. For example, cheaper own-brand products such as own-brand breakfast cereals were recorded instead of the branded product. Once designed and pilot tested, the shopping list was sent to NCH projects in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

### Shop selection

Those carrying out the surveys were asked to obtain details about retailers with whom project users regularly shopped. The shops surveyed therefore represent those chosen by consumers on a tight budget.

### Survey returns

In total, 40 surveys were carried out, based on data gathered from 47 retail outlets.

Surveys were carried out between August and December 2003.

Of the 40 surveys, 26 were conducted in England, of which six were conducted in the South West, five in London, five in the South East and seven in the North East. Fewer surveys were received from the North West of England, which returned two, while the Midlands carried out one survey. Nine surveys were conducted in Wales, four in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland.

Of the 47 retailers surveyed, 33 were undertaken in towns and cities. The remaining 14 surveys were carried out in rural towns and a village.

### Retailers included in the survey

Most surveys were carried out in large (19) and small (16) supermarkets. Five surveys were carried out in small, local general stores and three were carried out in butchers. Each of the following retailers were also included in the survey once: bakers, greengrocers, internet and street market.

## 2. The questionnaire survey and focus groups

### The questionnaire survey

The Food Commission designed a questionnaire, which NCH distributed to its projects for NCH service users to complete and return. The questionnaire included questions on income, expenditure on food, financial situation, budgeting techniques, children's diets, children's food marketing, and parent's diets.

The aim of the survey was to explore some of the factors affecting dietary patterns in 2003 and find out if the situation had improved for families on low incomes since the NCH survey published in 1991.

In total 55 questionnaires were completed and returned by parents who were NCH service users.

Data from the questionnaires were tabulated in Excel for analysis.

### The sample

There were 55 respondents, all of them women. Thirty-four lived in urban areas and 21 lived in rural areas. Thirty-one were single parents, 23 were from two-parent families and one household had more than two adults. Ten of the respondents had children who were a year old or younger and 28 had children who were at school. Fifty-three of the respondents were white British, one was Asian and one was mixed race (white/Jamaican). Out of the 55 respondents only one had a religious belief that affected the food they ate: being a Muslim she ate Halal meat.

### Focus groups

After the questionnaires were completed two family centres were chosen to carry out more indepth interviews. The focus groups were chosen to represent families in rural and urban areas. Both the rural and urban focus groups were attended by three service users. Questions asked ranged from financial concerns, managing on a low income, transport, coping strategies, dealing with the pressure caused by children's food marketing, their children's diets and their own diets.

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed into individual case studies. All information was given on a confidential basis, the projects have not been identified and all names given in the case studies have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

**Table 1 National distribution of sample**

Family distribution	Number (n=55)
North West	7
Wales	6
South West	12
South East	14
Scotland	2
Midlands	2
North East	12

## Appendix 2 Shopping basket survey list

Table 2 Shopping basket survey list: baskets designed for comparison with previous surveys		
<b>Unhealthy shopping basket</b>	vs	<b>Healthy shopping basket</b>
Bread (white sliced) large loaf		Bread (wholemeal) large loaf
Spaghetti (dried) white		Spaghetti (dried) wholemeal
White rice 1 packet		Brown rice 1 packet
Cornflakes 1 packet		Shredded wheat
Sausages (pork)		Low-fat pork sausages
Beef mince		Lean beef mince
Beef burgers (4 pack)		Low-fat beef burgers
Baked beans 1 can		Baked beans 1 can low salt/low sugar
Tinned peas		Tinned peas (no added salt or sugar)
Tinned peach halves (in syrup)		Tinned peach halves (in juice)
Soft margarine (eg Stork)		Sunflower low-fat margarine
Lard		Vegetable oil
Milk (whole)		Milk (semi-skimmed)
Mayonnaise		Low-fat mayonnaise
Cheese (cheddar)		Low-fat cheese (cheddar)
Crisps (small bag)		Low-fat crisps

## Appendix 3 Extended shopping basket survey list

Table 3 Extended shopping basket survey		
Unhealthy extended shopping basket	vs	Healthy extended shopping basket
Bread (white sliced) large loaf		Bread (wholemeal) large loaf
Bread rolls (white soft) 4 pack		Small wholemeal loaf
Spaghetti (dried) white		Spaghetti (dried) wholemeal
White rice 1 packet		Brown rice 1 packet
Cornflakes 1 packet		Weetabix
Rice Krispies 1 packet		Shredded Wheat
Beef (mince)		Beef (lean mince)
Bacon (smoked back)		Pork chops (lean)
Sausages (pork)		Low-fat pork sausages
Corned beef (1 can)		Tuna fish chunks 1 can
Beef burgers (4 pack)		Low-fat beef burgers
Fish fingers (10 pack)		Frozen cod steaks in sauce (1 packet)
Baked beans 1 can		Baked beans 1 can low salt/low sugar
Tomato soup 1 can		Tinned tomatoes
Tinned peas		Tinned peas (no added salt or sugar)
Tinned peach halves (in syrup)		Tinned peach halves (in juice)
Soft margarine (eg Stork)		Sunflower low-fat margarine
Lard		Sunflower oil
Milk (whole)		Milk (semi-skimmed)
Mayonnaise		Low-fat mayonnaise
Cheese (cheddar)		Low-fat cheese (cheddar)
Orange squash		Orange juice (1 carton)
Crisps (small bag)		Low-fat crisps

## Appendix 4 Five-a-day products shopping basket survey list

Table 4 Five-a-day products shopping basket
Baked beans 1 can low salt/low sugar
Tinned tomatoes
Cabbage
Carrots
Broccoli
Tinned peas (no added salt or sugar)
Apples
Oranges
Bananas
Tinned peach halves (in juice)
Sultanas
Orange juice

## Appendix 5 Case studies – NCH service users

### Hannah

Hannah lives with her partner and 18-month-old daughter in a village in the South East. Her partner works full-time. She looks after her daughter full-time.

She doesn't like food very much and doesn't really enjoy talking about it, and the other members in the focus group try to encourage her to eat more.

*'I go shopping once a week and spend £100 on food for me, my partner and my child. My partner takes me in his car, which means I am restricted on the sort of food I can get because he can only take me once a week.'*

*'The shop where I do my main shop is 10 miles away. That's the nearest big supermarket, it's too far to go more than once a week so I have to get most of my food then.'*

*'The nearest convenience shop is four miles away so if I run out of things it's difficult, especially as the only way I can get to it when my partner is at work is by bus and the buses don't run regularly.'*

*'My local shop where I buy bits and pieces doesn't sell broccoli – it doesn't have many different fruit and vegetables, what it does sell is not very nice and is too expensive and isn't fresh enough. The only vegetables it stocks are potatoes, cauliflower and carrots – it never has things like runner beans. You often can't get what you want there.'*

*'I don't eat fruit – I don't like it – I used to eat it when I was a kid. I can't remember the last time that I had fruit.'*

*'My daughter doesn't eat much fruit either, she used to like bananas but now she won't touch them. I have tried giving them to her but she doesn't like the way they feel. You put it in her mouth and she spits it back out.'*

*'We have vegetables twice a week on a Sunday with roast and sometimes on a Wednesday, only if it's fresh, if it's not fresh I don't buy it and there isn't enough variety. I only eat broccoli and cauliflower.'*

*'I buy the baked beans for my children, but that's got sugar and salt in it, hasn't it.'*

*'I haven't been to a McDonald's for years and my daughter's too young to ask to go there, she eats solids and that but I wouldn't give her McDonald's.'*

*'I don't drink soft drinks but I do have coffee with two sugars, I have about four of those a day.'*

*'I don't eat very much. I don't eat crisps, but my daughter likes them, she likes Skips – every day she has some, she has a few out of the packet – the rest I throw away.'*

## Rachel

Rachel lives with her partner and two children, Baca who is nearly four and James who is 22 months.

They live in a rural area in the South East of England. Her partner works full-time, she works part-time at Waitrose and they don't receive any extra help. She is very knowledgeable about food issues, and has developed coping strategies that help her to feed her family on the money she has.

*'When you see stuff coming through the till on a Thursday or Friday evening and you're thinking "you're lucky", sometimes I don't recognise the fruit they buy, one turned out to be a star fruit. They ought to know what it's like to want and it can make you feel very bitter. When you see what goes through the tills and you're thinking, "if only I could afford that", "how the other half live". When you want the best for your child but you just can't afford it and you see other people who can.'*

*'Everywhere is just so expensive for fresh fruit and fresh veg. The only way I can do it is if the veg is discounted or on special offer, sometimes I can buy three for the price of two. If it's not too deteriorated then I'll buy a load of it, blanch it, put it in freezer bags and freeze it. I have to keep my eyes peeled for the bargains.'*

*'I do my top-up shops at the shop in the village where I live. It has some fruit and veg in it but I just can't afford to buy it, so I just get the basics there like milk and bread.'*

*'There is a market in the nearest town but it's difficult to go shopping there, it has traffic all around, so it's practically impossible to keep hold of the kids and do your shopping at the same time. If my partner isn't working then sometimes I do have transport. If I get a chance to go at the end of the market day you can get some good deals then. But they don't always let you pick the veg yourself, they go behind the counter to do it, unless you say you want to look in the bag to make sure you've got good quality stuff.'*

*'Most of the time I do the shopping in the evening, when my partner isn't using the car and when I am not working – around 10 or 11pm in the supermarket that way I can get some bargains and I don't have to take the children with me.'*

*'Practically everything I buy is economy brand but I do not like processed food, if I can avoid it I do because of the salt levels and sugar levels.'*

### Shopping

*'I do a big shop once a month at a big supermarket and then top up between times. I spend about £180 a month on my big shop and then with the other bits and pieces I get it comes to probably about £250 a month for me, my two children and my partner.'* (This gives her £2.23 to spend on food for each family member per day.)

*'If you want to eat healthy you've got to fork out – for a family of four that's about £400 a month on food. We tried to get family tax credit, but we come just under by £1 so we don't get any extra help and I could really do with it. I find it a struggle to buy food for my family, and the only way I can manage it is by going for the foods that aren't healthy.'*

*'You've got to buy little and often with fruit, but it's usually cheaper if you bulk buy, but it goes off so quick.'*

## Diets

*'I can't buy exotic fruits like mangos for my family because I can't afford them. But I would love to be able to buy them.'*

*'I can't afford to buy a lot of the fresh fruit. I try and make sure my children have fruit, if it's a toss up between them, me and my partner having fruit, the children always come first. I go without to make sure the kid's have it.'*

*'Sometimes if you get the chance you can go strawberry picking in the summer– that makes it cheaper, but it's if I can use the car, if my partner's not at work, or I have time or money after the main shop. If you are lucky to have a blender, you can hide it in some milk, make a milkshake – that's a way to make sure it doesn't go to waste.'*

*'My children have crisps every day, as many as they can get their hands on but in reality a packet or two. I try and get the crisps on special offer then they are cheaper, sometimes the multi-pack bags get split and you can get them cheap – when I see them I dive in and get them.'*

*'My children love crisps, I avoid them. My mum was seriously overweight, with high blood pressure and I vowed never to get like her.'*

*'I don't like soft drinks, I usually have coffee and don't ask me how many because I lose count, when you've got two little ones you need something to keep you going. Usually I have sweeteners, try and set an example to the little ones.'*

*'I buy my children economy baked beans but they've got salt and sugar in them, practically all of them have. Unless you pay over the odds to buy the low-salt, low-sugar ones. I hate having to buy the economy brand because they aren't as healthy, they are watery, but if you get a little arrowroot that thickens it up and you can't taste it.'*

## Cooking

*'I try to cook everything from scratch, if I notice that there's mince going cheap I will buy it cook it on the slow cooker – the slow cooker doesn't use as much gas. Then I can put batches in the freezer and if I've got enough money for some puff pastry, I can make a beef and onion pie.'*

*'Of course bearing in mind we are always having it drummed into us that children shouldn't be having too much salt and sugar, it makes me feel bad that most of the foods I can afford to buy for my children are the most unhealthy ones.'*

*'I can afford to buy the supermarket's so-called 'extra large' frozen chicken twice a month – it's only £3.49 and I can get three meals for four of us out of that: roast on the Sunday, chicken and gravy on the Monday and a casserole on a Tuesday, which I cook on slow cooker.'*

## Children's food advertising

*'My kids are always asking for things they have seen on TV, Ronald McDonald's, Frosties, fruit winders, crisps and all the other brightly packaged on-the-go foods. And I think it's wrong that some head of the Food Advertising body said "no, we do not aim our adverts at the children", that's absolute rubbish, because if mothers are in the supermarket with the children pestering for something, nine times out of 10 they will give into them, they've got no choice if they want a quiet life.'*

*'They would take one look at those fruit Squidgers and say mum, I want them, Coca Cola and fruit shoots and Ribena – the more sugar, salt and fat a product has the more it's advertised at the children – that's what it seems like.'*

*'I am lucky because I manage to go and do my shopping 10–11 o'clock at night when my partner can be at home with the children. There are a lot of things I can't buy my children and if they don't like it they have to go without – that's it.'*

*'Never believe the label, always turn it round and read the list of ingredients on the back. I know a bit about labelling and foods; on this Coke bottle, it lists carbohydrate, that's refined sugar and it says 10g so that's how much sugar is in it. Ribena has 70g of carbohydrate or sugar – that's really high – so I wouldn't buy that.'*

*'If you don't get a chance to do any food hygiene courses or anything like that you wouldn't know these things. It's like salt – you have to watch how much salt is in your children's food – not a lot of people know that it's the sodium which is a constituent of salt is what you've got to read on the label.'*

*'I don't like McDonald's, but last week as a treat, I asked my daughter if she wanted to go to Pizza Hut or McDonald's and she said McDonald's (after seeing the Ronald McDonald's advert) and she really wanted the toy, so we went there. They do little packets of fruit, it's expensive for what you get at 59p but she was so good I said yes, and I knew it was better for her than the McFlurry stuff they had for pudding.'*

*'I avoid cooking with ready-made sauces. I make spag bol up from scratch, buy tins of whole plum tomatoes and chop them up because I am not paying an extra 6p to have someone in the processing line to chop them up for me!'*

We asked Rachel what she thought about the new proposals for the welfare foods scheme where pregnant women are given £2.80 a week towards milk, fruit and vegetables and cereal-based products, rising to £5.60 when the baby is born until it is a year old, it then falls back to £2.80 from 12 months to five years:

*'You wouldn't get fruit and veg for that as well as milk – it's hard enough. Where do they come up with these ideas, how do they think £2.80 is going to cover the cost of fruit and veg as well as milk. It's living in cloud cuckoo land. Why do they half it when your child is 12 months old – that's when they are eating more solids – that's when you want them to eat more fruit and veg. Is this a man that comes up with these ideas?'*

## Louise

Louise has two children, aged two and four years. She lives with them and her partner in the North East of England.

Her partner works full-time, and she looks after the children full-time.

### Shopping and money

*'I spend about £200 per week on food for the four of us. I only got back with my partner recently and before then I was having to feed me and the two children on just £50 a week and I couldn't manage it, we went without all the time, often I couldn't afford to buy Sunday lunch.'*

*'It was very hard too, living in the countryside, because as well as having to buy the shopping I would have to pay for a bus ride there and a taxi back. I had to get a taxi back because the buses don't run that often. This would add an extra £6 onto the shopping, which meant I went less often and had £6 less to spend on food.'*

*'Then I used to go shopping once a week. I would go for a big shop and then top up from the village shop. But the food at the village shop wasn't very good quality, the fruit and veg was a bit manky – I bought bread from there once too that went mouldy after just a day. Went shopping once a week, had to buy the economy brands, buy a pack of bananas and oranges.'*

*'I don't like the way the supermarkets put all the bread all open in baskets – uncovered – it's very unhygienic – that's why I buy it already packed.'*

### Diet

*'My children eat a lot of processed meat, burgers, chicken nuggets, fish fingers, stuff like that. I would say they have them every day. I say to them do you want McDonald's tea and do them chicken nuggets and chips, it's a treat. I have bought them the economy brand chicken nuggets.'*

*'I don't eat fruit but the kids eat it. I can usually buy a pack of bananas, satsuma and apples, I can't buy things like grapes and strawberries, they are too expensive.'*

*'I do use a lot of tinned stuff and frozen veg, I do buy fresh veg sometimes, I buy three for two but sometimes it goes off, given the choice between banana and a Jaffa Cake my son is going to go for the Jaffa Cake but that's my fault because I buy it.'*

*'I think meat is expensive, I like to buy chicken or beef for my family for Sunday roast but it's really, really expensive. They've got a cooked meat counter and if you go at the end of the day and they sell the meat off at half price.'*

*'I like cooking my kids spaghetti bolognese, I make it with mince, one of those sauces you get in the jar and mashed potatoes.'*

*'I drink a lot of Coke and so do my children. I get three big bottles a week – I got them on special, three bottles at £1 a bottle. I have about a litre to 1.5 litres a day. The children probably have one or two glasses a day.'*

*'The children have two packets of crisps a day, one with their lunch and a packet with their dinner.'*

*'My partner buys McDonald's happy meals for my children every night on the way home from work – it's a treat, they love the toys and always want them, it's not so much the food, it's more the toy that he's interested in.'*

### **Children's food marketing**

*'My son kept asking for fruit winders, because he had seen them advertised and then I bought them for him – he said he didn't like them so I have got nearly two boxes in the cupboard. He pesters me to buy Wotsits too and other crisps and Smarties too.'*

*'It says on the front of the fruit winders that it's made up of a lot of fruit but have you seen how sticky they are, I took one off him the other day because he didn't want it and I pulled it off the paper it comes with and it just sticks to your fingers, it's horrible.'*

*'The other thing he kept pestering for was Smarties. But he can't have things like the blue Smarties because of the E number, he gets hyperactive.'*

*'I have a junk food cupboard, with everything in it, crisps, sweets and stuff like that, I know they will eat them.'*

*'He keeps asking me to buy him these foods and I do because it keeps him happy.'*

*'Dairylea Lunchables, that's another thing he asks for but they are so expensive for what they are. But I buy him three boxes a week to take to school, because I know he will eat them. They did have a three for the price of two offer on so that was useful.'*

It has been suggested by the food industry that if parents do not want to be pestered by their children when shopping they can leave them at home. *'Well that's ok if you can manage that, my partner is at work so I can't leave them at home. The supermarket I go to has a crèche, but they won't take two year olds at the weekend, only on the weekday, and it costs money to put your children in there when you go shopping. A lot of people go shopping at the weekend when they get paid. It's easy for them to say that if they don't go shopping with their kids.'*

*'And you can't read the label when you've got screaming kids with you shopping with you.'*

*'Sweets are always by the checkout, that should be banned full stop. You get to the checkout and your kid has got a blimin' Kinder Egg in their hand and it's so difficult because you are sorting out the shopping and having to pay so you say go on then have it just to keep them quiet. They stick it right by the till.'*

*'And when it's hot what do they have right by the till – fridges with soft drinks in them or freezers with ice lollies and ice-creams and things.'*

*'You go in the local Tesco small supermarket and they have sweets at the tills and at the fag counter you can't get a packet of fags unless you're buying a Kinder Egg.'*

*'On the aisle ends they have sweets, it's awful, and the thing is they are within reach and it's the same thing when you go up to the fag counter they are usually low down where the children can pick them up.'*

Have you come across any healthy eating schemes? *'Haven't come across any healthy eating schemes here – I heard of one in the West Country, they do a lot of those down there but for some reason we don't get them here, is it because there are a lot of well-off people? There are too many McDonald's – there's two near where I live and Burger Kings too – it's junk everywhere you look, a lot of the kids drink lots of coca cola.'*

We asked Louise what she thought about the new government proposals for the welfare food scheme: *'It might encourage younger mothers to buy more fruit and veg.'*

*'I used to be able to buy bread, and nappies and stuff, which was good but they stopped that which is good 'cause people were using it to buy cigarettes. Those tokens are meant to be for the children, that's terrible – but some people would do it.'*

## Jane

Jane has separated from her partner and lives with her three children who are two, four and six years old. She has just moved into a new flat, which she is very proud of and keen to decorate. She looks after her children full-time so is on benefits.

*'I go shopping once a week on a Thursday and spend £80 on me and my three children's food.'* This gives her £2.86 a day to spend on each of them on food.

The shops are 15 minutes' walk from her house. She has to get the taxi back, which eats into the money she has for food.

*'I shop at Kwik Save and Iceland. They are really good for the special offers. I don't buy my fruit and vegetables there though, it's too dear.'*

*'I manage by buying things on special. I am always looking out for the two for one offers. By doing that I can afford to buy the branded goods, cereals like Frosties and Golden Nuggets, biscuits like Jaffa Cakes. Those are the ones the children are always asking for. I bought two boxes of 48 packets of crisps for the price of one for £1 each, that's really cheap, they were about to go out of date, but they taste alright.'*

*'I don't bother with branded bread though – I just get the cheapest economy white sliced.'*

*'I buy my fruit and vegetables from a butchers who has a stall outside his shop. He sells them cheaper than in the supermarkets, and it works out cheaper than going to the market, in town because that's a half hour bus ride away.'*

*'I owe money to seven catalogues, and I also owe money to the Provident – I owe them £950, I took out a loan for £500 and am paying it back at 100% APR. I have to pay them £40 a week before I pay anything else. If I don't pay them they turn up at the post office on giro day to take the money off you.'*

*'I often don't have enough money for food – first thing you do is pay off the debts, and then see how much money you have left for nappies and food.'*

### Jane's diet

*'I didn't have anything for breakfast, the first thing I have eaten today [at 2pm] is that biscuit I just had with my coffee.'*

*'I drink a lot of Coke, especially in the summer, usually I have one to two bottles a day.'*

*'That's what I usually do – yesterday all I had to eat was an evening meal: chicken curry and trifle, it was lovely.'*

*'Last night I got so thirsty I had to have some squash.'*

*'I have started to put on weight, which is good because I wasn't eating at all, but now I am up to eight stone so I am doing really well.'*

*'I don't really eat fruit and vegetables.'* When asked if she would eat more fruit and vegetables if she could, Jane said that yes, if she had more money she would. *'I like broccoli, carrots and cauliflower.'*

She drinks about 20 cups of decaffeinated coffee a day, she takes one sugar in each cup.

*'I used to drink caffeinated but my doctor told me I had to change to decaffeinated.'*

### **The children's diet**

*'I don't buy Smarties though they are always asking for them, I think the blue ones make them hyper.'*

*'My children would eat crisps all the time if they could, but I let them have one to two packets of crisps a day.'*

When asked whether she had heard of any five-a-day schemes, she said

*'My eldest is at school and the teacher there has a fruit basket so I don't have to buy fruit for her to take to school.'*

When asked what she gave her children for dinner last night, Jane answered, *'chips and fish fingers, Iceland had them on offer'*.

*'I try to give them vegetables twice a week. Sometimes, looking after three children, I don't have the energy to prepare and cook the vegetables.'*

*'I have home help to help me cook and the nursery nurse puts together a menu for my youngest bairn.'* This gives Jane support to provide her children with the food they need. The best home cooked meal she likes to make is spaghetti bolognese, which the home help makes. Sometimes she makes a Sunday dinner but her favourite home-cooked meal is chips.

*'I used to buy the smoked haddock and poach it in milk but I haven't had it for years.'*

When asked if her children had fruit yesterday, Jane said that only the eldest did, at school.

*'I took the children to McDonald's on Saturday, I love McDonald's. They are always asking to go there, they want the toys.'*

### **Marketing**

*'My children are always grabbing sweets at the checkout, when I take them off them they start having temper tantrums, it's so embarrassing. Sometimes if I can afford to buy the sweets I will but I can't always.'*

*'They are always asking me to buy Coke, I usually buy big bottles of cheap cola and that will get us through the week.'*

*'When I take them shopping they are always asking for the foods that you know have cartoon characters on the packaging.'*

*'My four year old is always after Frosties and Tweenies yoghurts.'*

*'Sometimes I leave the shopping behind if the kids are working it and that, I have walked out of the shop because it was too much. And sometimes I go back to get it and the trolley is not there!'*

We told Jane that she was to be given £10 for taking part in the focus group, and asked, if she were to spend all the money on food what she would get. Her reply was 'fruit and veg'.

We asked Jane if she was happy with the food she and her children ate and whether she felt it was healthy.

*'I am sick of eating chips every night. The community nurse is helping me to give the children more healthy food, she put up a menu to help me, so they have two different veg a week. Because I used to only give the children chips and beans most nights. So I am learning to give them more variety of foods.'*

## **Isla**

Isla has one child, a seven-month-old boy. She looks after him alone. She is from Angola and has been in the UK for two years. She had to flee Angola, leaving behind two children and her husband. Her first language is Portuguese. She is living in an area where immigrants are harassed. There are not many Afro-Caribbean people but more Asian. She has only recently moved to the North East and previously she was living in Birmingham.

*'I think in this country compared to back home it's much more expensive and harder to buy fresh produce. Back in Angola it was much easier to buy fresh fruit and vegetables compared to here. I cook everything from scratch. I like cooking rice with chicken and fish and salad.'*

*'When I lived in Birmingham, Tesco was near and that were better quality. The supermarkets that are near to here don't have the same sort of quality.'*

*'When I lived in Birmingham I lived near a big supermarket where I could get much better choice of fruit and vegetables.'*

*'There is a shop that sells African foods in town, I go there probably once a month because it's a half hour bus ride there.'*

*'I spend £30 a week on my baby (including nappies) and £20 a week on myself.'*

*'I like to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, and where I go shopping in Kwiksave, it isn't very good for that. I go there because it's near.'*

*'I have never bought fish fingers, if I buy fish I buy it fresh, the one I got yesterday for supper was mackerel – we had it with rice and broccoli and cabbage. I put the fish, potatoes and the vegetables all in one pot with an egg and cook it with some olive oil.'*

*'For breakfast this morning I had tea with two sugars, four slices of granary toast for breakfast with an egg.'*

*'I drink one cup of tea a day, the rest of the day I drink water.'*

*'Sometimes I buy jars of food for my baby but a lot of the time I mash up fruit and vegetables. When I started giving him the jars of baby food he wouldn't always accept the food I made for him from home.'*

*'I like Coke but I try to only have it occasionally. I drank it more often when I was pregnant but then I developed diabetes and my doctor said that I should stop drinking it.'*

*'In this country the farmers use pesticides and fertilizers to grow more food and to grow it quickly and it affects the taste and the quality. Where I was from farmers don't use pesticides so much and we grow our own food. Here if farmers don't use pesticides and things like that it's organic, and that costs much more than normal food. It's so much more than I could afford.'*

*'I wish I had a garden here – if I did I would grow my own food and save money. I would grow sprouts and carrots.'*

*'I try and give my baby a little mashed up fruit and vegetables every day, he is seven months old and is now eating food, but the fruit and vegetables are so expensive.'*

*'I like crisps and have them quite often, last time I had them was two days ago.'*

*'I buy dried chicken when I go to the African shop in town, I try and have it once a week.'*

*'I don't like McDonald's or places like that, I think that people go and eat there, they get very filled up. I think a lot of people in this country eat too much fried food.'*

Isla said if she were to spend the £10 on food she would buy food for her baby.

*'I am happy with the food I and my baby eat because we don't eat much fat, or fried foods and processed foods, and I think we eat healthily.'*

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