

Dates of Publication

Surveys are conducted quarterly:

March, June, September, December

**Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska
March 2000**

24 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of 24 communities were surveyed during March of 2000 for the cost of a specific set of food and non-food items. The 104 food items selected were taken, with some modification, from the USDA Low-cost Food Plan which is itself based on a nationwide survey of eating habits of Americans, conducted in 1977-78. In addition, the costs of such items as water, propane and electricity were collected. All costs were adjusted to reflect local sales tax where applicable.

The estimated prices of unavailable food items in various communities were calculated as the expected cost as judged from the prices of all available items relative to the price of those items in Anchorage. The percent of foods unavailable in each community are shown in the survey.

Weekly food consumption rates for a family of 4, children 6 - 11 years, form the basis of the expressed food costs. All other costs are ratios of that cost as calculated from the USDA Cost of Food at Home survey issued February 2000. The cost for this family of 4 can be calculated from the table by summing the individual members. For smaller families such a sum would be too low and should be adjusted up by 20%, 10% or 5% for families of 1, 2 or 3 persons respectively. Similarly, the sum for larger families would be too high and downward adjustments of 5% and 10% are suggested for 6 and 7 or more member families. These adjustments reflect that some economies may be realized when preparing foods for larger families.

Rows 18 through 22 represent historical food costs. The Anchorage column is a comparison of present to previous Anchorage costs. Similarly the U.S. Average column represents changes in U.S. average prices. A one (1) appearing in the Anchorage column indicates that the current

Anchorage cost is 1% higher now than at that date. Therefore, rising food costs are indicated by positive values. The remaining columns are each community's cost relative to Anchorage at that date. For instance, a cell containing a one (1) indicates a community that was experiencing a food cost 1% higher than Anchorage at that date. Note that the dollar value of the U.S. Average is not included in this survey since the methodology is not equivalent.

Choice of Beverages

The human need for water can be expressed as 1/2 cup of water for every 120 calories burned. Taking 2500 cal as a reference daily caloric benchmark, about 11 cups of water is our benchmark daily water intake. This water is lost via urine (55%), skin (as perspiration) (22%), lungs (17%) and feces (6%). There is no human requirement for any other bulk fluid except water. Water is a very important part of a healthy diet.

Water is a major component of all of the foods we consume. For instance, orange sections are 87% water, cheese 40% and baked chicken 20% water. The amount of water in a food is intimately associated with the caloric value of a food. All animals eat food according to their energy needs and calories are the ultimate measure of the energy value of a food. Water has no calories, so when the caloric value of a food is evaluated, it is done on a dry matter basis (water removed).

The nutrient density of a food is a measure of the ability of the food to support a person relative to the caloric content. Two extremes would be soda pop and milk. Soda pop contains no required nutrients relative to its caloric value. Milk contains all the major nutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, fats) required for growth and many of the micronutrients (vitamins, minerals).

Fruit drinks, fruit juice, milk and soda pop all provide water and calories, but only milk is a heavy hitter for nutrients. Even pure juices are little more than sugar solutions (24 grams sugar per 8 ounce glass), fortifying a beverage with calcium is meaningless if a person is not short for calcium or if a very modest amount of milk (or other dietary source of calcium such as green leafy vegetables) is consumed. But, is it possible to drink 2.5 liters of soda pop and still have a balanced diet? Of course it is. Such cola would provide only half the daily caloric requirement (25 grams sugar per 8 ounce glass) leaving the

other half to acquire all the required nutrients. In other words, the more pop consumed, the more carefully the diet must be chosen.

Pure fruit juices lie between as a component of a good diet. On the down side, they provide a lot of calories, usually have the fiber removed and have few major nutrients. On the up side, they provide fluid and many of the nutrients as recommended by the USDA. A juice made from whole fruit is essentially the same as eating the fruit itself, either is recommended by USDA, and may contain reasonable amounts of micronutrients.

One additional thought to keep in mind is that a multivitamin-mineral supplement costs about 2 cents a day to consume. Does that mean it is OK to take a supplement and then ignore good eating habits? Hardly. One supplement tablet and all the water you want each day will cost 2 cents and retire any argument that sugar solutions are a healthy and economical dietary choice.

Amount per 8 Ounces

Food	Cost (cents)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)	Fiber (g)	Calories
Water	0	0	0	0	0
Milk	23	11	8	0	150
Orange Juice	18	25	1.5	0.5	105
Orange Drink	19	31	0	0	130
Cola	18	24	0	0	116

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