# Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska
# December 2002

Up to three stores in each of 21 communities were surveyed during December of 2002 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 December 2002. 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 19 through 23 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.

# Trans-Fatty Acids

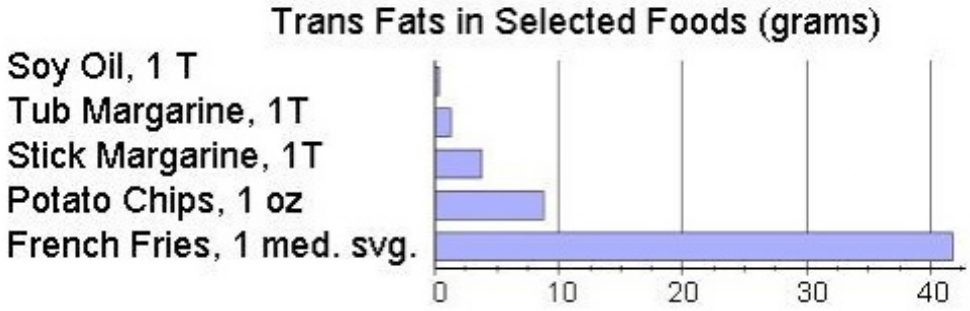
In broad terms food is composed of water and the macronutrients, carbohydrate, protein, and fat. Fats constitutes many substances, most common of which are the plant and animal cooking and table fats such as cooking oil and butter. Such fats are largely 'triacylglycerides', which is to say their largest component is fatty acids. Fatty acids may be classified as 'saturated' or 'unsaturated' as a way to describe their ability to have hydrogen added. Minimizing the jargon, the unsaturations (double bonds) provide the food chemist a point of manipulation for the chemical and physical properties of fat such as hardness or softness at room temperature. For instance, a vegetable oil such as corn oil can be converted to a solid fat such as margarine or shortening via the process of hydrogenation. An unintended but effectively unavoidable consequence of hydrogenation is the production of trans-fatty acids (trans fats). In the last decade research has raised profound health concerns regarding the consumption of hydrogenated fats (trans fats).

In the common parlance of cardiovascular disease, the substance known as cholesterol is referred to as good (HDL cholesterol) or bad (LDL cholesterol) depending on how it is

transported in the blood. Over consumption of saturated fat, as is commonly found in dairy products and red meat, is recognized as a risk factor for cardiovascular disease because it tends to increase LDL cholesterol and may reduce HDL cholesterol levels, an effect not seen with unsaturated fats (olive and many other vegetable oils). Trans fats affect LDL/HDL cholesterol in the same manner as saturated fats, but doubly so. It has been estimated that elimination of trans fats from the American diet could reduce the incidence of fatal heart attacks by 30,000 to 100,000 cases a year.

By far the largest source of trans fats in the American diet is from deep fat fried foods from fast-food restaurants. A small amount comes from intentional consumption of hydrogenated fats such as margarine. However, margarines are easily replaced with those tub margarines that do not have hydrogenated ingredients. Deep fat fried foods fried in unknown oils must simply be avoided. Frying at home can be done with non-hydrogenated oils.

Food package labeling of fats is currently ambiguous but is under review by the Food and Drug Administration. The food label category of Total Fats shows saturated but neither unsaturated fats nor trans-fats necessarily appear. Under the proposed changes to the food label, total fat will be shown and further divided into Saturated, Polyunsaturated and Monounsaturated categories. If trans fats occur above 0.5 grams per serving then saturated fat will be doubly apostrophized and a footnote will occur stating the whole number grams of trans fat.




Citations
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