

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska Quarter 3: September 2004

Up to three stores in each of 21 communities were surveyed during September of 2004 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 September 2004. 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.

Title: Good Carb, Bad Carb

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Confusion about the role that carbohydrates should play in the diet pervades the consciousness of every mindful shopper. On one hand, low carb foods are conspicuously located throughout the grocery store, promoting the image of a villainous macronutrient. On the other hand, we all know the benefits of fruits and vegetables (which are good sources of carbohydrates) promoted by the '5 a day' posters prominently hung above baskets of bananas, yams, and blueberries.

What is a carbohydrate? Carbohydrates are composed of sugar molecules linked together to form chains of varying lengths. Carbohydrates are an important source of energy, providing 4 kcal/gram. Although protein and fat are also sources of energy (providing 4 and 9 kcal/g respectively), the brain and red blood cells use carbohydrates exclusively. Sources of carbohydrates include sugar, grains, and vegetables.

Dietary Advice often calls for a distinction in the types of food we eat (e.g. white or whole wheat bread). Food is primarily composed of carbohydrates (sugars, grains, fruit), fat (oils, butter, lard), and protein (meat and meat substitutes such as egg white, dairy products, soy products and beans), as well as minerals, vitamins, and water. Some foods contain a great deal of essential nutrients (vitamins and minerals), others don't and should be considered mostly as sources of calories. We are concerned about over consumption of certain carbohydrates because they often occur in foods that are poor sources of essential nutrients. Such foods can be called energy dense foods (as compared to nutrient dense foods).

White or whole wheat bread? Whole grains are intact seeds without the natural seed coat removed. In order to make white flour or white rice, the seed coat of the grain is polished off before the seed is ground to flour. This removes the dark color and also removes many of the nutrients and much of the roughage (fiber). Certain nutrients are added back to the food, a process called enrichment, but fiber is not. Since fiber is an important part of the diet, whole grains are a healthier dietary selection than the equivalent 'white' grain. The fiber component is itself a complex carbohydrate, but one that is largely indigestible even after cooking. Fiber promotes health of the gut and may lower blood cholesterol. Whole grains take longer to digest and therefore are more slowly absorbed which results in less burden on blood sugar levels.

A good diet has plenty of nutrients and fiber and no more calories than necessary. Any excess food (calories) we eat, regardless of their source, will contribute to weight gain. The best dietary advice still is to eat a variety of foods

including plenty of fruits and vegetables. Always select foods with higher nutrient content, such as whole grain bread, when you have a choice. Also, combine a balanced diet with plenty of exercise to keep your body weight within the optimal levels. Further information on healthy eating is available from the Center for Nutrition Policy Promotion at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov>.

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