# **The Cost of a Healthy Food Basket for Families with Children in Israel**

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**Abstract**

**Background & Aims**: Dietary guidelines for families with children aim to meet the Dietary Recommended Allowance (DRI). However, the cost of a healthy diet may be a barrier to adherence to dietary guidelines. As part of policies to support sustainable, low-cost health diets, the Israeli Ministries of Health (MOH) and Economy launched 2020 a healthy food basket (HFB) containing 64 selected healthy foods. This study aims to estimate the weekly food cost for households with children based on the Israeli dietary guidelines using food items from the HFB. Further, to examine the proportion of food costs from net income quintiles by geographic area of residence and trends over a year.

**Methods:** The distribution of ages and number of children per household in 2018 was obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Food prices were obtained from the commercial company "Stornext." The cost of the commodities that made up the recommended menus for adults and children were calculated using food portions and frequency per standard person and as a percentage of the household's net income. The proportion of households where food expenditures exceed 15% of income was calculated by income quintile and geographic area of residence. The food cost was compared by quintile and residence, following changes in food prices during 2018.

**Results**: The average daily cost of a healthy menu was 40.17 NIS; the cost of the menu increased with age. The ratio between the average cost of breakfast, lunch, dinner, and two intermediate meals was 1.5:3.4:1.2:1, respectively. The median monthly expenditure on the menu for households with children as a percentage of net income was 20% (about 5,000 NIS per month). However, large variability and an inverse association with socioeconomic status (SES) were found. Food costs were 55% of the household's net income for the first quintile and 9.3% for the 5th(highest) quintile, and the median value was 23%. The highest monthly average cost was in Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem (5780 NIS and 5700 NIS, respectively), and the lowest was in the Northern District (4860 NIS). The potential expenditure on vegetables was the highest component of the food budget, with an average cost of 29% monthly, followed by the meat and meat substitutes (e.g., soy) group (19%). Legumes and eggs were the less costly (3% and < 1% respectively).

**Conclusions**: High cost was identified for the recommended menus for families, using very conservative methods, suggesting meeting the recommendations questionable. Significant gaps in the cost of a healthy menu were identified by income quintile, household composition, and geographical area. Policies to lower the overall food costs for families should be determined and examined using stakeholder consultation and examination of economic policies.

**Keywords:** Affordability; Children; Food cost; Healthy Food Basket; Nutrition Policy