

# The cost of a healthy food basket

Pilot study of two household types in Northern Ireland



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# 1 Introduction

A good diet and adequate food supply is central to promoting health and wellbeing. A poor quality diet is associated with higher rates of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers. Social and economic conditions impact on diet quality which in turn contributes to health inequalities. This relationship is recognised and addressed at a policy level in NI through the Fitter Future for all framework<sup>(i)</sup>. Access to a healthy diet requires transport, money and skills such as budgeting and food preparation. Food is the most flexible aspect of the household budget due to the fact the consumers can meet hunger and calorie needs on cheaper, nutritionally-poor foods.

## Research context

This research uses Consensual Budget Standards methodology to establish the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for different household types. An MESL is a standard of living that meets an individual's or a household's physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level. A Minimum Essential Standard of Living is not a poverty standard or a standard for particular groups in society. It is a standard below which nobody should be expected to live.

The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research provides details on the expenditure and income needs of a large range of household compositions. This is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet their minimum needs. There is no single answer to what the cost of an MESL is. The result is complex, as the cost of an MESL varies by household type and composition, location and employment pattern. The detail and flexibility of this research provides an evidence-based measure, grounded in the lived experience of households, with which to assess the adequacy of social welfare rates and wage levels across a broad range of household compositions.

This pilot research focuses on one element of the MESL: food. The aim of this pilot research is to construct a food basket for two household types in Northern Ireland using Consensual Budget Standards methodology. The two household types under consideration are:

- A two-adult and a two-child household, with one child in pre-school (aged 2–4) and one in primary school (aged 6–11)
- A pensioner living alone

This report is presented in the context of concerns about the issue of poverty generally in Northern Ireland, and a growing awareness about food poverty and the cost of a healthy diet. Food poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access

to food, with related impacts on health, culture and social participation being felt. Food poverty therefore not only affects what people eat, it also impacts on people's lifestyles, social interactions and health.

Limited financial resources and the cost of nutritionally adequate food are two of the barriers to achieving a healthy and balanced diet and associated good health. Data published in 2014 by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency<sup>(1)</sup> show that in 2012/13, there were approximately 338,000 people (19% of the population) in relative poverty before housing costs and approximately 368,000 people (20% of the population) in absolute poverty before housing costs. The data also show that approximately 89,000 children (20%) were in relative poverty before housing costs and 96,000 children (22%) were in absolute poverty before housing costs. The data for pensioners show that in 2012/13, approximately 58,000 pensioners (20%) were in relative poverty before housing costs and approximately 63,000 pensioners (21%) were in absolute poverty before housing costs<sup>(2)</sup>.

Furthermore, a recently published report from Save the Children also highlights the issue of rising costs and how this has affected low-income households. The research found that rising food costs have placed particular pressure on the budgets of low-income families. It notes that between 2005 and 2014, the price of food across the UK rose by 19% more than the general price level. The report notes that the cost of food is presenting a challenge and that a quarter of low-income parents acknowledge that they buy the cheapest food possible compared to 14% of high-income parents. The consequences of this is that children living in poverty are less likely to eat fresh fruit and vegetables on a daily basis, as it is often perceived to be cheaper to buy ready-prepared meals and processed foods. The report also notes that as a result, children living in households experiencing income inadequacy are more likely to suffer nutrition-related illnesses, such as diabetes and obesity, which can have a detrimental impact on childhood development<sup>(3)</sup>.

It is in this context that the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice<sup>1</sup> (VPSJ) conducted a pilot study on the cost of a minimum, essential but nutritionally adequate food basket for two household types. The aim of the research is to demonstrate what the weekly cost of a healthy food basket is and to highlight the impact that this has on household income.

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<sup>1</sup> The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice was established in 1996 to work for social and economic change – tackling poverty and social exclusion – [www.justicematters.ie](http://www.justicematters.ie). The members of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice are the Society of St. Vincent de Paul [www.svp.ie](http://www.svp.ie), the Vincentian Congregation [www.vincentians.ie](http://www.vincentians.ie), Congregation of the Holy Faith [www.holyfaithsisters.org](http://www.holyfaithsisters.org), and the Daughters of Charity [www.daughtersofcharity.ie](http://www.daughtersofcharity.ie). A list of previous VPSJ reports is provided in the Appendix.



## 2 Methodology

### Background and development of consensual budget standards research

The Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) data generated in this pilot study is based on a methodology called Consensual Budget standards (CBS) that was originally developed by the Family Budget Unit, University of York, and the Centre for Research in Social Policy at the University of Loughborough<sup>(4)</sup>. Details of its development are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Historical overview of consensual budget standards methodology

#### **The cost of a minimum essential standard of living with the primary focus on experts**

The Family Budget Unit (FBU), University of York<sup>(5)</sup>, developed the Low Cost but Acceptable (LCA) budget standards approach to determine the minimum level of expenditure needed for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living. This methodology uses empirical data from national surveys of poverty and exclusion to determine prevailing patterns of consumption in society and to arrive at a consensus on what are the essential necessities of modern living. Input from focus groups is also used to:

- Gain information on the shopping patterns of low-income households
- Draw up a framework for the food menus and shopping lists
- Assist in the validation process of the budgets
- Learn about the realities of life on a low income

#### **The cost of a minimum essential standard of living with the primary focus on people**

The Centre for Research on Social Policy (CRSP) at the University of Loughborough developed the Low Cost but Acceptable (LCA) budget standards methodology to take account of the actual expenditure choices and judgments made by people in real life as they manage their money to contribute to a final consensus, “Ultimately the people are the experts”<sup>(6)</sup>. This methodology avoided expert judgments and reaching consensus by coincidence, and is known as the Consensual Budgets Standards (CBS) (7-10).

#### **Determining the cost of a minimum essential standard of living according to the people, with input from the experts**

Development of the Consensual Budgets Standards (CBS) by people in real life about goods and services that everyone in Britain should be able to afford while, at the same time, drawing on expert knowledge about basic living requirements and expenditure patterns<sup>(4)</sup>. This methodology was developed in 2004 by the Family Budget Unit at the University of York, in partnership with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at the University of Loughborough.

The CBS approach has been applied in the development of the cost of a healthy basket for six household types in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) since 2006. The MESL data generated is being used extensively by various NGOs, trade unions, community and voluntary organisations, and statutory agencies, particularly in the period preceding and following the publication of the national budget. The CBS approach is being increasingly adopted internationally. Variations on the methodology have been used in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Consensual Budget Standards are currently being developed in France, Austria and Japan. The strength of the data is that it is robust and consumer led.

The Centre for Research and Social Policy (CRSP) at the University of Loughborough used Consensual Budget Standards methodology to launch the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for Britain in 2008 <sup>(11)</sup>. In 2009, a study was undertaken to investigate the extent to which the MIS Great Britain data were applicable to Northern Ireland <sup>(12)</sup>. The study consisted of desk-based research; work with focus groups in Belfast and Omagh, and expert advice on fuel and housing costs and on the local pricing of goods. In light of their findings, the research team concluded that “given the overall similarities between the Great Britain and Northern Ireland budgets the minimum income standard for Britain can fairly be described as representing a minimum standard for the whole UK”<sup>(12)</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, costs were greater for fuel, personal goods and services, and transport. Costs were less for council/domestic rates, household services, household insurance and social, and cultural participation. Costs were similar for food, alcohol, clothes and household goods. For the most part, the differences were relatively small and cancelled each other. Of the seven household types tested, two of the households, the single working-age adult household and pensioner households, were within 2% of the Great Britain MIS totals, and five were within 5% of the GB MIS totals <sup>(12)</sup>.

The current pilot work that focuses on the food element of the CBS approach was commissioned by **safe food**, the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland and the Consumer Council Northern Ireland. It was decided to focus on two different household types in NI, a two-adult, two-child household and a single pensioner household. Unlike the previous work in NI, where participants adjusted an existing menu for the household, the process of menu development started from scratch.

### **The consensual budget standards process**

Consensual Budget Standards “aims to develop a standard which will be rooted in social consensus about goods and services that everyone ‘should be able to afford’”<sup>(11)</sup>. The approach requires the establishment of focus groups for each of the different household types. Three focus groups are held per household type.

Each focus group includes people from different socio-economic backgrounds. The groups act as their own budget standard committees, where “the actual expenditure choices and judgments that are made by people in real life on the ground, as they manage their money contributes to the final consensus” on minimum essential living standard requirements<sup>(6)</sup>. Experts are consulted when necessary (e.g. nutritionists). There are four stages to the CBS methodology:

### **Stage 1 – Orientation**

The initial stage explores the language, concepts and priorities that people use in thinking about spending and consumption. During this stage, the group develops a working definition of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) and identifies the difference between needs and wants.

### **Stage 2 – Focus groups**

At this stage, focus groups study each budget component in turn (i.e., food, clothing, household goods, fuel, etc.). Together the participants produce an agreed list of minimum essential items and reach a negotiated consensus about the goods and services that are necessary for an MESL.

### **Stage 3 – Costing**

The items agreed by the focus groups are priced by the researchers and a minimum essential standard budget is developed. In the course of developing a household budget, over 2,000 items are priced, and these are then categorized into 16 areas of expenditure.

### **Stage 4 – Check back**

This final stage which involves the focus groups is particularly important as it requires the re-checking of items and costs in order to reach the final negotiated consensus. Participants in the focus groups are asked to once again evaluate the content of the budgets to ensure that only minimum essential items are included. In this phase, focus group participants are asked to study the budget cost of each of the 16 areas of expenditure. The group is also required to consider a “request from the Minister of Finance” to reduce costs and to explain the rationale for their response<sup>(6)</sup>.

## **Pilot Approach**

This pilot study is limited to the development of a food basket for two household types:

- A two-parent and two-child household; children aged 2–4 and 6–10
- A pensioner living alone

For this reason, the methodology, while based on Consensual Budget Standards methodology, was adapted to take account of the fact that only one budget area, food, was under consideration. The two household types were chosen as they are two of the largest household types in NI census data<sup>(13)</sup>. One person households (aged 65+) represented 11% of households and a married couple with dependent children households represented 19.7% of households in NI. These are also households at risk of poverty and express concerns about food costs (2) (14).

## **Focus groups**

Three focus groups, seen to represent different segments of the population, were established in three different areas of Northern Ireland: Derry/Londonderry, a city in the north-east of Northern Ireland; Enniskillen, a town in a rural area in Co. Fermanagh; and Belfast in Co. Antrim. Dallas Fieldwork, a market research agency, was contracted to establish the focus groups in each area for the two household types

under consideration in this pilot research. The members of each focus group represented different socio-economic backgrounds.

In light of the VPSJ's experience of working in the Republic of Ireland, it was decided that all three focus groups would participate in the first three stages of the CBS process: 1. Orientation stage; 2. Task Group stage; and 3. Costing stage. It was accepted that it would be unnecessary to involve all three focus groups in the fourth and final stage, the Check Back stage, and that participation in this stage would be limited to the Belfast focus groups. However, it was also understood that the Derry/Londonderry and Enniskillen focus groups might also be involved in this fourth stage if it was considered necessary.

### **Stage 1 – Orientation**

This is a very important stage in the research process. Time is spent arriving at a shared understanding of what constitutes a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) and a healthy diet. Posters are used to illustrate the eatwell plate and also to represent the family type under consideration. During the Orientation stage, time is provided to discuss the importance of concentrating on the household depicted in the poster and what is required of that particular household to have a nutritionally adequate diet, which at a minimum essential level, meets the requirements of the eatwell plate. While participants were reminded of the value of their own experiences, it was emphasised that individual experiences should not be used to determine adequacy. The collective wisdom of the group and the requirements of the eatwell plate were seen as key elements in arriving at a negotiated consensus.

### **Stage 2 task – Focus group work phase 1**

The Derry/Londonderry focus groups were the first to participate in the study. The focus group for each household type developed seven-day menus. The menus devised by the Derry/Londonderry focus groups were based on a negotiated consensus on what constituted a minimum essential healthy diet. The focus groups also identified outlets in which food items should be bought. The menus developed by the Derry/Londonderry focus group for each household type were then studied by the second wave of focus groups, based in Enniskillen.

The Enniskillen focus groups discussed in detail the menus and made amendments to the menus. These amendments were decided by arriving at a negotiated consensus.

The third wave of focus groups was based in Belfast. The Belfast focus groups amended the data that resulted from the work of the Enniskillen focus group and reached a consensus on the seven-day menus.

Between phase 1 and phase 2, the menus developed by the focus groups for each household type were converted into a shopping list of food items, and the outlets identified in the course of phase 1 of the focus groups were listed for the consideration of the focus groups in phase 2.

### **Stage 2 task – Focus group work phase 2**

The amended version of the menus, which was the outcome of the work of the three focus groups at Phase 1 was studied by each group in the three locations. A number of minor changes were made and a negotiated consensus regarding this second version of the menus was reached. The second version was

sent to the nutritionists from the Northern Ireland Centre for Diet and Health, Ulster University, for in-depth consideration, and adjustments were made to the menus developed by the focus groups. These adjustments were found to be minor in detail. The role of the nutritionists is detailed in section 2 under the heading Analysis.

### **Stage 3 – Costing**

The food items were priced and the total cost of the food budget was calculated. A more detailed description of the pricing process is outlined in the section on Pricing. Special offers were not taken into consideration as these are temporary and often have associated terms and conditions.

### **Stage 4 – Check back**

The previous experience of the VPSJ in establishing budget standards in the Republic of Ireland showed that focus groups had little difficulty in reaching a socially negotiated consensus regarding a food budget that was based on a minimum essential standard of living which was nutritionally adequate and which allowed for variation in menus. Other areas of expenditure, such as savings, and social inclusion and participation, require more prolonged consideration and time before a socially negotiated consensus is achieved. The fact that the Northern Ireland pilot study was limited to the development of the food budget also led to the conclusion that it might be sufficient to involve only one focus group – the Belfast Group – in this stage of the process. The experience of the earlier work with the three Northern Ireland groups at Stages 1, 2 and 3 showed that groups had little difficulty in resolving differences and arriving at a consensus when there was a shared understanding of a clearly defined task.

The actual work with the Belfast group during this Check Back phase confirmed that there was a high level of consensus about the cost of the food items and the total cost of the food budget. There was also a general acceptance of the changes proposed by the nutritionists that were seen to be understandable and appropriate. For these reasons, it was considered unnecessary to engage the Derry/Londonderry and Enniskillen focus groups in this stage of the process. As already stated, had the Belfast focus group faced any difficulty in reaching the consensus, the researchers would not have hesitated to involve the other two groups.

## **Analysis**

The role of the nutritionist is to ensure that the menus put together by successive waves of focus groups meet a minimum standard and are broadly in line with the eatwell plate. The eatwell plate shows the proportions of different types of food that should be eaten to maintain a well-balanced and healthy diet. The eatwell plate is a visual representation of how different foods contribute towards a healthy balanced diet. The size of the segments for each of the food groups is consistent with government recommendations for a diet that provide all the nutrients required for a healthy adult or child (over the

age of two). The eatwell plate is not meant to represent the balance required in any one specific meal or over a particular timescale; rather, it represents the overall balance of a healthy diet<sup>2</sup>.

The seven-day menus for the household types under consideration in this pilot study were given to nutritionists at the Northern Ireland Centre for Food and Health (NICHE) at Ulster University to be tested for nutritional adequacy. A nutritional software program, WISP V4.0, Tunuviel Software, was used to analyse the menus. The experts analysed the menus and added a layer of detail to the menus, including assigning appropriate food weights for each household member. Food weights were assigned using published portion-size information. To assign appropriate food weights for each household member, the following publications were used:

- Adults: Food Safety Authority (FSA), Food Portion Sizes, 3rd edition
- Pre-school child: **safe food**, What is a serving size? A Guide for Pre-schools<sup>(15)</sup>; British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), 5532 a-day - perfect portions for toddler tums!<sup>(16)</sup>
- Primary school child: Nutrition & Diet Resources (NDR), What's enough?, A guide to age-appropriate food portion sizes<sup>(17)</sup> (for children aged between two and 18 years); together with estimates due to a lack of published information

Milk intake during the preschool/school day was based on the amount provided by the government-funded milk programme in NI schools, and school meal selections were taken from menus provided by schools within NI. Cooking methods that are in line with healthy eating recommendations were followed where possible (i.e. grilling or baking, not adding salt and using good quality meat were the options chosen throughout). Menus were based on the needs of four adults, with the exception of the soup, which was based on the requirements of six individuals, as it was considered that this was what was likely to happen within the home. The amounts of perishable foods (e.g. breads and butter) were kept consistent to ensure the menu was practical and cost effective.

While the nutritionists did not have to make sweeping changes to the menus developed by focus groups, they found the menus to be high in saturated fat and salt, and, as a result, a number of adjustments were made to the menus.

Minor changes to the Pensioner's seven-day menu comprised:

- Using margarine instead of butter, choosing low fat cheese, semi-skimmed milk, low-fat mayonnaise and chicken without skin, and removing cheese from Bolognese sauce to reduce saturated fat intake
- Adding Weetabix and using wholegrain spaghetti to increase the fibre levels
- Increasing fruit and vegetables slightly to ensure the five-a-day (400g/day) recommendations were met.

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<sup>2</sup> Further information on the eatwell plate can be found at: [www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx)

Minor changes to the family's seven-day menu comprised:

- Adding in a bowl of cereal for the female adult in the household as an evening snack to increase iron and calcium intake
- Removing full-fat milk from the menu in the home and replacing it with semi-skimmed milk for all household members to reduce saturated fat intake
- Using margarine instead of butter, choosing low-fat yoghurts, low-fat mayonnaise and roast chicken with no skin, and removing black pudding (children only) to reduce saturated fat (and salt) intake
- Substituting a pineapple slice for cheese on toasties to reduce saturated fat intake and increase fruit and vitamin intake
- Reducing the quantity of crisps eaten by the household to reduce salt and saturated fat intake
- Increasing fruit and vegetables slightly to ensure 5-a-day (400g/day) recommendations are met
- Additional portions of wholemeal toast provided for the adult male to increase his calorie intake
- Adjusting portion sizes for children to reduce calorie intake, e.g. half a sandwich for supper, smaller pancake sizes, one egg for the primary-school goer for breakfast, one cracker, removing one portion juice.

These changes did not fundamentally alter the menus drawn up by the focus groups, but nevertheless were vital to ensuring that the menus and the subsequent food baskets (Appendix 2) were as close as possible to the requirements of a healthy and balanced diet. The adjustments made to the menus by the nutritionists were recorded and brought back to the focus groups at the final phase for their approval. The focus groups approved the changes made by the nutritionists.

The final menus meet the majority of the UK Department of Health (DoH) nutritional requirements (Dietary Reference Values (DRV) and Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) updated energy requirements). Remaining areas of concern for the nutritionists were the amounts of sodium and saturated fat (children only), and the final values were (recommendations in brackets):

- Sodium - Pensioner 2,776mg (1,600mg), Dad 3,419mg (1,600mg), Mum 2,738mg (1,600mg), Primary child 1,757mg (1,200mg), Preschool child 1,467mg (500mg)
  - These values compare closely to recent UK dietary surveys of 4–6yrs, 3.7g (present study, 4g; recommendation, 5g); 19–64yrs, 8.3g (present study, 6.95g and 8.68g [mum and dad respectively]; recommendation, 6g); 65+yrs, 7.2g (present study, 7.1g; recommendation, 6g); (National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS), 2008/09–2011/12)
  - Bread, cereal and meat were the main sources of salt in all menus
- Saturated fat – Primary child, 12.8% calories from saturated fat (11%); preschool child, 14.1% calories from saturated fat (11%)
  - However, values obtained fell below values obtained in recent NI dietary surveys: 1.5–3 yrs., 14.8%; 4–10yrs, 13.6% (National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) NI, 2008/09–2011/12)
  - The main contributors to saturated fat intake were milk and milk products (37%) (31% in NDNS survey)

However, the menus for each age group were at or below the average of current dietary intake in these groups. In addition, new composition data show that some products consumed from the menu, e.g. bread, have lower salt and saturated fat levels. The software is currently being updated with these new values and at the time of the analysis, only the old values were available.

Despite some minor adjustments by the nutritionists, the menus are essentially decided by the focus groups and reflect that while food is necessary from a physical point of view, there are also social and cultural aspects to food. Following completion of, and agreement on, the final menus (Figure 2, Figure 3), a detailed shopping list was prepared and priced in stores identified by the focus groups.

### Pricing

The final price of the food basket is the weekly cost of all food items. While a large number of food items are bought on a weekly basis, other items such as oil and sugar, etc., need only be purchased every few weeks or even months. For the purposes of this research, the costs of items are calculated to ascertain their weekly cost. To do this, the cost of the item is divided by the number of weeks it is expected to last. Pack sizes were used in relation to the portion size needed to set the lifetime for any item with a shelf life of more than one week. All focus groups agreed that the kitchen would be equipped with a fridge-freezer unit.

The pricing of food items was done online at the Tesco grocery website ([www.tesco.co.uk](http://www.tesco.co.uk)) the week beginning November 3, 2014. All pricing was completed within five days. Tesco was chosen as the supermarket of choice as it has the largest grocery market share in Northern Ireland. In November 2014, Tesco had 35.3% of the market share. No special offers or discounts were taken into consideration as has already been mentioned, and the cost of the basket reflects the full price of all items. The majority of items are Tesco own brand; however, it is important to note that by and large the cheapest Tesco brand, which is “Everyday Value”, was not priced. While a Minimum Essential Standard of Living is based on needs and not wants, this does not mean that the cheapest item or brand has to be purchased. In order to allow choice, people should not have to buy the cheapest item possible and that is why the “Everyday Value” brand was not selected. For some items, the focus groups specified the quality and brand of items required, and so the final price list includes a mixture of Tesco’s own brands and named brands.

There was a strong consensus in all of the focus groups that meat, such as chops, joints, etc., should be purchased in a butcher’s. Focus groups spoke of the importance of being able to purchase good-quality meat. This finding was also reflected in an earlier study on food culture in Northern Ireland that found that “participants were very clear they did not want to buy cheap meat. As a consequence, most of the women used several food outlets on a regular basis, buying most of their food in a supermarket and then going to a local butcher to buy meat” <sup>(18)</sup>. Similar sentiments were expressed in the focus groups, and meat items were therefore priced in a local butcher’s identified by the focus groups in three locations: Derry/Londonderry, Enniskillen and Belfast. The price of meat in the food baskets is the average price across the three butcher shops.



## The cost of a healthy food basket

The focus groups also spoke of shopping locally and the tendency to buy one or two items each week in the local shop/convenience store. As a result, and as agreed by the focus groups, bread and milk were priced in a local Spar to reflect the shopping habits of the focus groups.

Finally, while Enniskillen was selected to represent a rural area in Northern Ireland, no major differences emerged between the urban (Belfast and Derry/Londonderry) and rural focus groups in terms of food shopping patterns or the stores that were identified for grocery shopping. For the purposes of this research, there was no need to develop a separate minimum essential food basket for households in rural areas of Northern Ireland. That said, as this is a pilot study and only one rural area was selected, more research would be needed to examine if there were additional or different costs or shopping patterns as a consequence of living in rural areas of Northern Ireland.

## Income

For the household type, the following income scenarios were examined:

- Two-parent and two-child household
  - Dependent on state benefits
  - One adult in the household working and earning the minimum wage, one adult a stay-at-home parent
- Pensioner living alone
  - In receipt of state pension with no other source of income

The income scenarios presented for the households are hypothetical and are an example of a sum of money that a household would get into its hands, or “take home income”, for the income scenarios under consideration. It should be noted that not all entitlements were taken into consideration due to the difficulty in identifying a common scenario. The scenarios are only a case in point to illustrate the food basket in relation to typical household income and should not be interpreted as a real case. The online calculator, [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk), was used to help generate the income scenarios.

# 3 Results

## Introduction

This section details the results of Consensual Budgets Standards methodology to establish a food basket for the two household types under consideration in this pilot study:

- Two parents and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11)
- Pensioner living alone

Consensual Budget Standards methodology aims to reconcile the views of members of the public on what they regard as a reasonably healthy diet, which is realistic in terms of eating habits, preferences and treats, with the views of experts who promote and advocate a healthy, balanced and nutritionally-adequate diet. This section presents the menus agreed by the focus groups and nutritionists; details the weekly cost of a minimum essential food basket; and examines the cost of sub food categories, such as bread and cereals, and fruit. Also under consideration is the proportion of income that is required by each household type to be able to afford the food basket drawn up by members of the public in Northern Ireland

## Final seven-day menus

The final seven-day menus for the family and pensioner households are detailed in Figure 2 and Figure 3 respectively.

## Two parents and two children, pre-school and primary school

Table 1 shows the total weekly cost of food and alcohol for this household type. The total weekly cost of the basket is £119.17. This equates to approximately £17 per day. All focus groups agreed that the budget should include some alcohol to be consumed at home. Alcohol for home use is purchased from the supermarket. Alcohol was included in the assessment of the overall nutritional adequacy of the diet. Also included in the basket is the cost of school milk and lunch for the child attending primary school, £20 for a takeaway once a month and £60 for additional food spending at Christmas.

Table 1: Weekly cost of food basket for two parents and two children, one in pre-school and one in primary school

Basket items	Cost
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	£110.68
Alcohol to be consumed at home	£8.49
Total cost of the basket	£119.17

Figure 2: Final seven-day menu for family household - two adults and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11)

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
<b>Mon</b>	<p>Weetabix (2 x 2 Weetabix for adults and primary school child, 1 Weetabix for pre-school child)</p> <p>1 piece of fresh fruit per household member x 4 apples</p> <p>Glass of orange juice for children and adults (150ml)</p> <p>Male adult: wholemeal toast (x 2 slices) with spread</p> <p>Tea with milk for adults</p>	<p>Primary school child: school milk (paid for by parents) and 1 piece of fruit, pear</p> <p>Pre-school child: glass of milk and 1 piece of fruit, pear</p> <p>Adults: cup of coffee with milk and 2 biscuits each</p>	<p>Primary school child: school lunch (£2.40) and water</p> <p>Pre-school child: beans on toast (x 1 slice) and water</p> <p>Adults: beans on wholemeal toast (x 2 slices per adult) and tea/coffee</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk</p> <p>Adults: cup of coffee</p>	<p>All members: spaghetti bolognese (spaghetti, 1lb mince, tinned tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, onion, carrots and garlic. Grated cheese on top)</p> <p>Water for all household members</p> <p>Banana x 4 after dinner</p>	<p>Children: toast with spread (1 slice for pre-school child and 1 slice for primary school child)</p> <p>Male adult: 2 slices of toast with spread</p> <p>Female adult: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea</p>
<b>Tue</b>	<p>Brown toast with butter and marmalade (2 slices for adults and primary school child; 1 slice for pre-school child)</p> <p>1 piece of fresh fruit per household member x 4 oranges</p> <p>Glass of milk</p> <p>Tea with milk for adults</p>	<p>Primary school child: School milk (paid for by parents) and 1 yogurt</p> <p>Pre-school child: glass of milk and 1 small yogurt</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea/coffee and yogurt each</p>	<p>Primary school child: tuna (tin), mayonnaise and pasta</p> <p>Water</p> <p>Pre-school child: tuna (tin), mayonnaise and pasta and glass of water</p> <p>Adults: tuna (tin), mayonnaise and pasta and cup of tea</p>	<p>Children: cup of hot chocolate</p> <p>Adults: cup of coffee</p>	<p>All members: beef stew (stewing steak) with beef stock, potatoes, onions, carrots, garlic, celery and leeks</p> <p>Glass of water for all household members</p> <p>Pear x 4 after dinner</p>	<p>Children: bowl of cereal (cornflakes) with milk</p> <p>Male adult: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea</p>

Figure 2: Final seven-day menu for family household - two adults and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11) *Continued*

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
<b>Wed</b>	<p>Porridge for adults</p> <p>Ready Brek for children 1 piece of fresh fruit per household member x 4 kiwis</p> <p>Glass of orange juice for children (150ml)</p> <p>Tea with milk for the adults</p>	<p>Primary school child: school milk (paid for by parents) cheese and crackers</p> <p>Pre-school child: glass of milk and cheese and crackers</p> <p>Adults: cup of coffee and crackers and cheese</p>	<p>Primary school child: school lunch (£2.40) and water</p> <p>Pre-school child: homemade vegetable soup made with vegetable stock, celery, carrots, onions, potato, leeks and 1 slice of bread. Glass of water</p> <p>Adults: homemade vegetable soup made with vegetable stock, celery, carrots, onions, potato, leeks and 2 slices of bread. Glass of water</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk and 1 banana</p> <p>Adults: cup of coffee and banana</p>	<p>All members: stew same as Tuesday</p> <p>Glass of water for all household members</p> <p>Yogurts x 4</p>	<p>Children: ham &amp; pineapple toastie and glass of milk</p> <p>Male adult: ham &amp; cheese toastie</p> <p>Female adult: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea/coffee</p>
<b>Thu</b>	<p>Pancakes x 2 for all members with butter and jam</p> <p>Natural yogurt with fresh fruit, e.g. banana for all household members</p> <p>Glass of orange juice for children and adults (150ml)</p> <p>Tea with milk for adults</p>	<p>Primary school child: school milk (paid for) and 1 apple</p> <p>Pre-school child: 1 slice of toast and glass of milk</p> <p>Adults: coffee and portion of nuts</p>	<p>Primary school child: school lunch (£2.40) and water</p> <p>Pre-school: homemade ham &amp; salad sandwich with lettuce, cucumber, tomato. Piece of fruit, an apple and sugar-free orange squash</p> <p>Adults: homemade ham &amp; salad sandwich with lettuce, cucumber, tomato. Piece of fruit, e.g. apple, and glass of water</p>	<p>Children: cup of homemade vegetable soup left over from Wednesday's lunch</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea</p>	<p>Pork chops (6 small/medium chops for family of four, 2 per adult and 1 per child) with apple sauce, frozen peas, broccoli and potatoes</p> <p>Glass of water for all members</p> <p>4 x kiwis</p>	<p>Children: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Male adult: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea</p>

Figure 2: Final seven-day menu for family household - two adults and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11) *Continued*

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
<b>Fri</b>	<p>Brown toast with butter and marmalade (2 slices for adults and primary school child; 1 slice for pre-school child)</p> <p>1 piece of fresh fruit per household member x 4 oranges</p> <p>Glass of orange juice for children (150ml)</p> <p>Tea with milk for adults</p>	<p>Primary school child: school milk (paid for by parents) and 1 kiwi</p> <p>Pre-school child: 1 kiwi and glass of milk</p> <p>Adults: coffee and Kit Kat each (2 sticks)</p>	<p>Primary school child: egg and salad sandwich with lettuce, cucumber and tomato.</p> <p>Cheese and crackers.</p> <p>Sugar-free orange squash</p> <p>Pre-school child: egg and salad sandwich with lettuce, cucumber and tomato, and glass of sugar-free orange squash</p> <p>Adults: egg and salad sandwich with lettuce, cucumber and tomato, 1 plum and cup of tea</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk and 2-stick Kit Kat each</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea/coffee</p>	<p>Children: 2 fish fingers each with oven chips and mushy peas</p> <p>Adults: piece of frozen white fish (e.g. Donegal Catch), oven chips and mushy peas</p> <p>Glass of sugar-free orange squash for children</p> <p>Water for adults</p> <p>Cheese and crackers for all members</p> <p>Male adult: beer x 2</p> <p>Female adult: half a bottle wine</p>	<p>Children: yogurt and glass of milk</p> <p>Male adult: bowl of cereal (cornflakes)</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea/coffee</p>
<b>Sat</b>	<p><b>Brunch</b></p> <p>Fry or grill: sausages, bacon, eggs, potato bread, tomatoes, mushrooms, pudding (except children)</p> <p>Brown toast and butter</p> <p>Glass of orange juice for children and adults (150ml)</p> <p>Tea/coffee for adults</p> <p>Children: apple and glass of milk</p> <p>Adults: apple and cup of tea</p>			<p>Children: yogurt and glass of sugar-free orange squash</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea</p>	<p>Beef stir-fry with noodles and garlic, broccoli, onions, peppers, carrots, mushrooms in a black bean sauce</p> <p>Glass of water all household members</p> <p>Male adult: beer x 2</p> <p>Female adult: half a bottle of wine</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk and a small treat, e.g. crisps</p> <p>Adults: tea and a bag of crisps</p>

Figure 2: Final seven-day menu for family household - two adults and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11) Continued

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
Sun	<p>Boiled eggs and brown toast (2 eggs per adult, 1 per child)</p> <p>1 piece of fresh fruit per household member x 4 bananas</p> <p>Orange juice for pre-school child (150ml)</p> <p>Water for primary child</p> <p>Tea/coffee for adults</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk</p> <p>Adults: tea/coffee and 2 biscuits each</p>	<p><b>Sunday roast</b></p> <p>Roast chicken with gravy, roast and boiled potatoes, stuffing and carrots, frozen peas and cabbage</p> <p>Apple tart and ice cream</p> <p>Water for adults</p> <p>Male adult: beer x 2</p>		<p>All members: ham &amp; tomato toastie</p> <p>X 4 yogurts for all household members</p> <p>Water for children</p> <p>Cup of tea/coffee adults</p>	<p>Children: glass of milk and small Kit Kat</p> <p>Adults: cup of tea/coffee and one 2-finger Kit Kat</p>

The cost of a healthy food basket

Figure 3: Final seven-day menu for pensioner household - pensioner living alone

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
<b>Mon</b>	X 2 Weetabix with semi-skimmed milk 1 piece of fruit, banana Cup of tea	Cup of coffee and 1 piece of fruit, orange	Ham, cheese, cucumber, lettuce and tomato sandwich  Glass of water and cup of tea 1 low-fat yogurt	Cup of coffee	Chicken curry (chicken left over from Sunday lunch) and rice with mushrooms, frozen peas, peppers and onion, garlic  Glass of water Apple tart and ice cream (left over from Sunday)	Hot chocolate/cocoa
<b>Tue</b>	Bowl of porridge 1 piece of fruit, apple Cup of tea	Cup coffee and 2 digestive biscuits	Beans on two slices of toast  Glass of water and cup of tea 1 low fat yogurt	Cup of coffee	Pork chops grilled (2 small chops or 1 large chop) with apple sauce (homemade), 2 potatoes (mashed), carrots and cabbage  Glass of water	Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits
<b>Wed</b>	X 2 Weetabix with semi-skimmed milk, piece of fruit, 1/2 grapefruit Cup of tea	Cup of coffee and 1 piece of fruit, banana	Ham & cheese toastie with tomato and lettuce  Glass of water and 1 cup of tea 1 low-fat yogurt	Cup of coffee	Beef stew with beef stock, stewing steak, onions, garlic, potatoes, carrots, leeks and celery  Glass of water	Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits
<b>Thu</b>	1 boiled egg with two slices of toast with 1 piece of fruit, 1/2 a grapefruit Cup of tea	Cup of coffee with 2 digestive biscuits	Homemade vegetable soup (stock made with the shin bones from the butcher) with carrots, onions, potatoes, mushrooms, leeks, celery, lentils and 1 white crusty bread roll  Glass of water and cup of tea	Cup of coffee and an apple	Beef stew as Wednesday Glass of water	Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits

Figure 3: Final seven-day menu for pensioner household - pensioner living alone *Continued*

Day	Breakfast	Mid-morning	Lunch	Mid-afternoon	Dinner	Evening snack
<b>Fri</b>	Bowl of porridge 1 piece of fruit, banana Cup of tea	Cup of coffee with a bun/pastry	Homemade soup (same as Wednesday) and 1 white crusty bread roll  Glass of water and cup of tea	Cup of coffee and an orange	Frozen fish (e.g. cod in batter), oven chips, mushy peas and white sauce  Glass of water	Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits
<b>Sat</b>	Grill: 2 slices of bacon, 2 sausages, egg, tomato, mushrooms  Brown toast with butter Cup of tea	Cup of coffee and 1 piece of fruit, e.g. orange	Tuna and mayonnaise (low fat) salad with lettuce, sweet corn, tomato, cucumber, peppers and onion  Glass of water and cup of tea  1 low fat yogurt	Cup of coffee	Spaghetti bolognese (wholemeal spaghetti, mince, onions, garlic, peppers, carrots, mushrooms, tin of tomatoes)  Glass of water  Half a bottle of wine	Hot chocolate/cocoa and piece of cake
<b>Sun</b>	Scrambled eggs (made with two eggs) with brown toast with butter  Cup of tea 1 piece of fruit, apple	Cup of coffee with 2 digestive biscuits	Sunday roast: roast chicken (without skin) and 1 boiled potato, 1 roast potato, carrots, broccoli and gravy  Dessert: ice cream and apple tart  Half a bottle of wine	Pears canned in juice	Egg and salad sandwich with cucumber, tomato, lettuce and onion  Glass of water	Hot chocolate/cocoa and piece of cake



### Expenditure by sub-food category

Table 2 details expenditure on food by sub-category. The food items have been categorised into 16 sub-headings. While the majority of headings are based on the UK Consumer Price Index (CPI), additional categories that are not used by the CPI were created for the purpose of this paper. These are the categories of Takeaways, Treats, School lunch and milk, and Extra for Christmas.

Table 2: Expenditure by sub-food category

Sub-food category	Cost per week	Proportion of the basket
Bread and cereals	£12.85	10.78%
Meat	£30.18	25.33%
Fish	£3.95	3.31%
Milk, cheese and eggs	£13.47	11.30%
Oils and fats	£1.54	1.29%
Fruit	£13.43	11.27%
Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers	£13.52	11.35%
Sugar, jam and syrups	£0.46	0.39%
Food products n.e.c. <sup>3</sup>	£1.19	1%
Coffee, tea and cocoa	£1.89	1.59%
Mineral waters, soft drinks and juices	£2.27	1.90%
Alcoholic beverages	£8.49	7.12%
Takeaways	£5.00	4.20%
Treats	£3.93	3.30%
School lunch and milk	£5.83	4.89%
Extra for Christmas	£1.15	0.97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£119.17</b>	<b>100%</b>

Meat is by far the largest sub food category of the expenditure, costing £30 per week and accounting for just over a quarter of the total weekly cost of the food basket. Expenditure on fruit and vegetables, when combined, is £26.95 per week. The categories of fruit and vegetables account for 22.62% of the total weekly food basket.

Expenditure on milk, cheese and eggs also accounts for a significant proportion of the food basket for this household type. This sub category of food costs £13.47 per week and accounts for 11.3% of the total weekly spend on food. This is closely followed by expenditure on Bread and cereals, which costs £12.85 per week and accounts for 10.78% of the food basket. The sub-food categories of sugar, jams and syrups and Food products n.e.c. are two of the least expensive components of the food basket.

<sup>3</sup> n.e.c. refers to “not elsewhere classified”

## The cost of a healthy food basket

The category of School lunch and milk costs £5.83 per week and is 4.89% of the total food basket. Included in this category is the cost of buying school milk each school day and buying a school lunch three times during the school week. The quantity of bought school lunches included in the basket was based on discussions with focus groups and their own habits regarding school lunches. There was a consensus amongst all of the family focus groups that the tendency for this household type is to have a mixture of homemade lunches and bought lunches, and this is reflected in the basket. However, it is important to note – and it was noted by the focus groups – that households are entitled to free school meals if the parent/guardian is in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance, or if the parent/guardian is in receipt of a Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit and has an annual taxable income of £16,190 or less.

The focus groups agreed that an additional £60 should be included in the basket to purchase additional food at Christmas, such as a turkey, ham, extra condiments and snacks and treats. When calculated on a weekly basis, this comes to £1.15 per week and is only 0.97% of the total food basket. Nevertheless, focus groups spoke of the additional expense of occasions such as Christmas. Furthermore, while only additional money for Christmas is included in the MESL food basket, the family focus groups highlighted other occasions, such as children's birthday parties and Halloween, that necessitate extra spending on food. While this pilot study is concentrating on the food basket only, items such as additional spending on birthday parties is ordinarily included in the Social Inclusion and Participation category of the fuller Minimum Essential Standard of Living research. The fact that these occasions were highlighted by focus groups again underscores the point that food is linked to social inclusion and participation and that being unable to participate in events and activities that are considered a normal part of everyday life due to inadequate income is one of the outcomes of food poverty.

As noted earlier, alcohol is included in the weekly basket. The focus group participants felt that as a minimum, the adults in the household should be able to purchase alcohol to consume at home. The weekly cost of this sub category is £8.49 per week and accounts for 7.12% of the total weekly food spend.

The category of Treats is 3.3% of the total weekly food basket. This category includes an apple tart once a week, ice cream, crisps and Kit Kats. These items were included in the assessment of the overall nutritional adequacy of the diet. Also included in the food basket is the cost of a takeaway once a month. Focus groups agreed a sum of £20 per month. On a weekly basis, this is £5 per week and represents 4.2% of the total weekly food basket. The inclusion of alcohol, treats and a takeaway once a month highlights the social and cultural aspects of food. These items ensure that the minimum essential food basket is based on real-life experience and that while food is, of course, necessary for survival, there is also a social and cultural dimension to it as well.

A final point to note on the food basket for this household type is that the quantities of tea, coffee, milk, biscuits and Kit Kats were increased to allow for visitors. The minimum essential food basket thus reflects the behaviour and shopping patterns of members of the public. The basket, devised by focus groups, ensures that this household type has a standard of living that not only meets their physical needs, but also their social and psychological needs at a minimum but acceptable level.

### Food spending as a proportion of income

This section examines the cost of the minimum essential food basket as a proportion of household income. For this household type, two income scenarios are examined:

- Dependent on state benefits
- One adult in the household working and earning the minimum wage, and one adult a stay-at-home parent

The income scenarios presented for this household type are hypothetical and are an example of a sum of money that a household would get into their hand, or take home, for the two income scenarios under consideration. The scenarios are only a case in point to illustrate the food basket in relation to typical household income and should not be interpreted as a real case. The online calculator, [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk), was used to help generate the income scenarios.

### Two parents and two children; dependent on state benefits

In this hypothetical scenario, it is assumed that this household is living in social housing and in receipt of state benefits. Housing Benefit is based on the average weekly rent charged by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 2012–2013, which was £58.76<sup>(19)</sup>. It is also assumed that this household is not paying for childcare and does not have savings in excess of £6,000. It is also assumed that nobody in this household was working, or worked less than 26 weeks between April 6, 2011, and April 5, 2013. It is also assumed that this household does not have any other source of income. Table 3: Income for household dependent on state benefits outlines this household’s income when dependent on state benefits. Total weekly income for this household is £338.23.

Table 3: Income for household dependent on state benefits

Entitlement	Yearly	Weekly
<b>Means-tested income entitlements</b>		
Tax credits	£6,051.70	£116.38
Jobseekers allowance	£5,928.64	£113.70
<b>Means-tested bill reductions</b>		
Housing Benefit (rates)	£799.87	£15.34
Housing Benefit	£3,055.52	£58.76
<b>Other income entitlements</b>		
Child Benefit	£1,770.60	£34.05
<b>Total entitlements</b>	<b>£17,606.33</b>	<b>£338.23</b>

## The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 4 shows the cost of the minimum essential food basket as a percentage of household income. The minimum essential food basket would require this household to spend 35.23% of its total weekly income on the food basket.

Table 4: The cost of the MESL food basket as a proportion of household income

<b>Total Weekly Income</b>	<b>Weekly Cost of the Food Basket</b>	<b>Food Spending as a % of Income</b>
£338.23	£119.17 <sup>4</sup>	35.23%

Considering that the food basket is only one area of expenditure that must be met by households, the percentage of income required is very high and most likely beyond the financial abilities of most low-income households in this situation. This finding has been replicated in previous research that has highlighted the cost of a healthy diet as a barrier to healthy eating (20, 21).

## Two parents and two children; one parent working full-time and earning the national minimum wage

In this hypothetical scenario, it is assumed that one parent is working fulltime (37.5 hours per week) and earning the national minimum wage of £6.50 per hour, while the other parent is on stay-at-home duties. It is also assumed that no childcare is required and that this household is living in social housing and paying rent of £58.76 per week (19). Table 5 outlines the income for a household in this scenario, comprising earned income and income from entitlements. In this hypothetical scenario, total weekly income for this household is £415.03. This is based on net income and any additional benefits that this household may be entitled to.

Table 5: Weekly income for household with one person working fulltime earning the national minimum wage

<b>Income</b>	<b>Yearly</b>	<b>Weekly</b>
<b>Earned Income</b>		
Net earned income	£11,568.44	£222.47
<b>Means-tested income entitlements</b>		
Tax Credits	£8,210.59	£157.90
<b>Means-tested bill reductions</b>		
Housing Benefit	£31.91	£0.61
<b>Other income entitlements</b>		
Child Benefit	£1,770.60	£34.05
<b>Total income (earned and entitlements)</b>	<b>£21,581.54</b>	<b>£415.03</b>

<sup>4</sup> This figure includes the cost of school milk and three school lunches per school week. However, in this scenario, this household may be entitled to free school meals, and this would reduce the cost of their food basket.

## The cost of a healthy food basket

Table 6 shows the minimum essential food basket for this household type as a proportion of income. As demonstrated in Table 6, while the food basket as a percentage of household income is less in this working scenario than it is for a household dependent on state benefits, it would nevertheless require this household type to spend 28.71% of its total weekly income on the food basket. Again, this is a very significant proportion of household income, and as food is only one area of expenditure that must be met by households, it is difficult to see how low-income families could afford the cost of the minimum essential food basket. This scenario emphasises the financial burden that the cost of a minimum essential but nutritionally adequate food basket places on low-income households.

Table 6: The cost of the MESL basket as a proportion of household income

Total Weekly Income	Weekly Cost of the Food Basket	Food Spending as a % of Income
£415.03	£119.17 <sup>5</sup>	28.71%

Inadequate income is one of the causes of food poverty, and it is apparent from this pilot study that a minimum essential food basket would be a significant cost to low-income households and would require a considerable portion of their income. For people living on an inadequate income, many may have to forgo what members of the public in Northern Ireland regard as necessary items for a food basket that meets this household type's physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum, but acceptable, level.

## Pensioner living alone

This section examines the cost of a minimum essential food basket for a pensioner living on their own. The food basket is broken down into sub categories and the cost of each sub category is detailed. This is followed by an examination of the food basket as a percentage of household income.

Table 7 details the weekly cost of the minimum essential food basket for a pensioner living alone. The total cost per week is £59.13, which equates to £8.44 per day. Included in the weekly basket is £10 per week to allow this household to buy extra food for visitors and also to consume a minimum amount of alcohol at home.

The food basket represents what members of the public regard as a minimum but socially acceptable standard of living for a pensioner living on her own. The food basket has been tested by nutritionists to ensure it allows for a healthy, balanced and nutritionally adequate diet.

Table 7: Weekly cost of the food basket for a pensioner living alone

Basket items	Cost
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	£55.14
Alcohol to be consumed at home	£3.99
Total cost of the basket	£59.13

<sup>5</sup> This figure includes the cost of school milk and three school lunches per school week. However, in this scenario, this household may be entitled to free school meals, and this would reduce the cost of their food basket.

### Expenditure by sub-food category

Table 8 breaks down the food basket into 15 sub food categories of expenditure. Similar to the family household type, most of the categories are CPI sub-indices food categories. However, for the purposes of this report, a number of additional categories had to be created. These are the categories of Takeaways, Treats, Extra for Visitors, Extra for Christmas and Eating Out.

Similar to the family household type, the category of Meat is the largest category of expenditure, costing £11.55 per week and accounting for 19.53% of the total food basket, while spending on Fish accounts for a much smaller proportion of the total weekly food basket, at 3.79%. Vegetables also account for a large share of the food basket, costing £9.18 per week and accounting for 15.52% of the total food basket, whereas Fruit accounts for a considerably lesser proportion of the food basket, at 5.11%. When the categories of Meat, Fish, Vegetables and Fruit are combined, they account for approximately 44% of the total food basket.

Table 8: Expenditure by sub-food category

Categories	Cost per week	Proportion of the basket (%)
Bread and cereals	£2.35	3.98
Meat	£11.55	19.53
Fish	£2.24	3.79
Milk, cheese and eggs	£3.74	6.32
Oils and fats	£0.49	0.83
Fruit	£3.02	5.11
Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers	£9.18	15.52
Food products nec <sup>6</sup>	£1.82	3.07
Coffee, tea and cocoa	£1.05	1.78
Alcoholic beverages	£3.99	6.75
Takeaways	£3.00	5.07
Treats	£2.47	4.18
Extra for visitors	£10.00	16.91
Extra for Christmas	£0.48	0.81
Eating out	£3.75	6.34
<b>Total</b>	<b>£59.14</b>	<b>100.00</b>

<sup>6</sup> n.e.c. refers to “not elsewhere classified”

## The cost of a healthy food basket

The category of Bread and cereals accounts for a small proportion of the total weekly food basket, at 3.98%, and costs £2.35 per week. Other categories that also account for a lesser proportion of the food basket include the categories of Oils and fats and Coffee, tea and cocoa.

Alcohol, which in this case is one bottle of wine per week, accounts for 6.75% of the total weekly food spend. Again, similarly to the family focus group, the pensioner groups felt that as a minimum, this household type should be able to purchase a small quantity of alcohol for consumption at home. The focus groups argued that the inclusion of a small quantity of alcohol reflects the normal shopping patterns and behaviours of this household type, and that one bottle of wine per week represents an appropriate minimum amount of alcohol.

The food basket also includes money for takeaway food. The focus groups reached a consensus that this household should be able to have a takeaway once every fortnight, allowing £6 per takeaway, which equates to £3 per week. Also included in the basket is money for eating out once a month. The group agreed that £15 per month should be included in the food basket for this purpose, equating to £3.75 per week. When the categories of Takeaways and Eating out are combined, they account for 11.42% of the total food basket. Participants in the focus groups argued that it was important for people living on their own not to have to cook every day of the week and to be able to eat out on occasion.

A large proportion of this household's total weekly food basket is the £10 per week that has been categorised as Extra for visitors. This accounts for 16.91% of the total weekly cost of the food basket. Focus groups spoke of the importance of being able to afford to have friends or family over to visit. While this is a significant cost, the focus groups regarded it as an essential component of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

The food basket for this household type illustrates that there is a link between food and social inclusion. Being unable to afford to have friends or family to visit, or to have a takeaway or a meal out on occasion, can cause isolation. The food basket demonstrates that a Minimum Essential Standard of Living is not based on what people can afford, but on what people should be able to afford at a minimum but acceptable level. This food basket, drawn up by pensioners living in Northern Ireland, clearly demonstrates that members of the public believe that a food basket should include more than just the necessities to sustain people: it should also allow pensioners living on their own to have a standard of living that enables them to participate in society.

### **Food spending as a proportion of income**

The income scenario presented to examine food spending as a proportion of household income is hypothetical and is an example of a sum of money a pensioner living on their own would get into their hand. Again, the scenario presented in this report for this household type is only a case in point to illustrate the food basket in relation to typical household income and should not be interpreted as a real case. The online calculator, [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk), was used to help generate the income scenario.

## The cost of a healthy food basket

In this hypothetical scenario, it is assumed that this individual owns their home outright and is entitled to the full basic pension rate of £113.10 as well as a pension credit and rates benefit. This household's total weekly income is outlined in Table 9 and is £163.69.

Table 9: Weekly income for pensioner living alone and relying on the state pension

<b>Weekly Income</b>	<b>Annually</b>	<b>Weekly</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Pension	£5,881.20	£113.10
<b>Means-tested entitlements</b>		
Pension Credit	£1,833.00	£35.25
<b>Means tested bill reduction</b>		
Housing Benefit (rates)	£799.97	£15.34
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£8,514.17</b>	<b>£163.69</b>

Table 10 shows the proportion of income that would be required by this household type in order to be able to afford the minimum essential food basket. As shown, the minimum essential food basket requires 36.12% of this household's income.

Table 10: The cost of the MESL basket as a proportion of income

<b>Total Weekly Income</b>	<b>Weekly Cost of the Food Basket</b>	<b>Food Spending as a % of Income</b>
£163.69	£59.13	36.12%

This scenario demonstrates the impact that just one area of expenditure can have on a household's income. It underscores the fact that when a household is managing on a limited income, decisions have to be made regarding what items take priority in terms of household spending. Given that the data for pensioners show that in 2012/13, approximately 58,000 pensioners (20%) were in relative poverty before housing costs and approximately 63,000 pensioners (21%) were in absolute poverty before housing costs <sup>(2)</sup>, it is fair to assume that many low-income pensioners are unable to afford the cost of the minimum essential food basket as established in this pilot project.



## 4 Discussion

This pilot research project has established the weekly cost of a minimum essential food basket for two household types in Northern Ireland. The final menus and the subsequent food baskets have been agreed by focus groups and tested by nutritionists to ensure that they meet the requirements of a varied, balanced and nutritionally adequate diet.

The final menus were warmly received by both the pensioner and family focus groups. The focus groups regarded the seven-day menus as varied, balanced and realistic in terms of their own eating habits and food choices. The focus groups very much saw the benefit of using Consensual Budget Standards methodology as the menus reflected their own lived experience and were based on food items that they would ordinarily eat. As one participant in the family focus group noted:

*"The menus have to be realistic. They have to come from real people. Nutritionists can put things on a menu that you would never buy or find it hard to get in a supermarket."*<sup>7</sup>

Another participant noted that they would feel embarrassed if a nutritionist came to the focus groups with already established menus that were quite different from their own eating habits. This participant said to save embarrassment, they would *"just agree with them"*.<sup>8</sup>

The focus groups also highlighted a number of other points in relation to the minimum essential food baskets and the cost of food more generally. The pensioner focus groups were in general happy with the cost of the food basket but acknowledged that the cost could be prohibitive for low-income pensioners and that many pensioners relying solely on state benefits would be unable to afford the minimum essential food basket. They felt that the reality of living on a low income is not recognised and that politicians *"don't understand the reality of having to live on so little"*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Quote from participant in phase 3 of the Belfast family focus group.

<sup>8</sup> Quote from participant in phase 3 of the Belfast family focus group

<sup>9</sup> Quote from participant in phase 3 of the Belfast pensioner focus group

The family focus groups on the other hand were surprised at the weekly cost of the food basket and the cost of providing a balanced and nutritionally adequate diet. A point was made by a number of participants in the family focus group that many households, particularly low-income households, would be unable to afford the cost of the minimum essential food basket. One participant in the family focus group stated that:

***“Families on benefits could not afford to spend this much money on food per week.”<sup>10</sup>***



Furthermore, it was also pointed out in discussions with family focus groups that food is regarded as a flexible component of a household’s budget, and that paying bills such as the electricity or gas bill would take precedence so that the amount spent on food is what is left over after other costs and bills are paid<sup>11</sup>. As a consequence, families may end up buying cheaper, processed foods that are high in salt, sugar and calories but are nutritionally inadequate.

The issue of special offers also arose during discussions with focus groups. The family focus groups highlighted that nowadays there are often special offers and promotions in the supermarkets which they can avail of. While special offer items were not priced during this pilot study, participants in the family focus groups mentioned that special offers can make a difference and can be of benefit to families.

Pensioners on the other hand did not seem to benefit from special offers and multi-buy discounts. The participants in the pensioner focus groups pointed out that offers appear to be targeted at larger households and often are of no use to those living on their own. This finding was also echoed in other research by Age UK. Their research *“Food Shopping in Later Life Barriers and Service Solutions”* (2012) found that “a particular example that causes much dissatisfaction among older people is widespread use of buy-one-get-one-free offers (BOGOF) and similar multi-buy deals that offer discounts for buying in bulk. For those who either live alone or aren’t able to carry a lot, these offers are seen as making food shopping more expensive and increasing the difficulty of shopping in small quantities<sup>(22)</sup>. These sentiments were echoed in the pensioner focus groups. Furthermore, participants in the pensioner focus group also raised the issue of food being sold in portions too large for people living on their own. They did not feel that supermarkets catered for people living on their own, and therefore those living on their own have to spend more on food than they actually need and waste food as a result.

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<sup>10</sup> Quote from participant in phase 3 of the Belfast family focus group

<sup>11</sup> Average electricity annual bill in NI is £622 or £11.96 per week calculated using Power NI’s standard credit tariff from 1 April 2015 and a consumption of 3,800kWh. Average gas annual bill in NI is £619 or £11.90 per week calculated using SSE Airtricity’s standard credit tariff in Greater Belfast from 1 April 2015 and a consumption of £13,500. Source: Consumer Council.

Another issue that was raised in the pensioner focus groups was the cost of cooking, and the financial burden that it placed on those living on their own. Participants in the focus groups said that in terms of energy costs, it is as cheap to cook for a number of people as it is for one person, and that this is one of the additional costs faced by those who live alone. Pensioners, in particular, also spoke of the importance of having the ability to freeze food as it made sense economically and it resulted in less waste.

The food baskets established in this pilot project have been derived by public consensus and reflect the norms and behaviours of ordinary members of the public in Northern Ireland and what they regard as essential for a minimum food basket. The baskets have also been examined by nutritionists to ensure they provide for a healthy, balanced and nutritionally-adequate diet. The outcome of this pilot study is a minimum essential food basket for two household types. The food baskets constitute a healthy and balanced diet, but also reflect the lived experience of each household type under consideration in this research. The menus drawn up by focus groups also demonstrate that food serves many functions. While food is necessary for survival, it is also acutely tied to social inclusion and participation. Indeed, previous research on food culture in Northern Ireland also highlighted the social nature of food: *“We eat to celebrate social events, we build social relationships by inviting people to eat with us ... in summary, food and food consumption is profoundly social”*<sup>(18)</sup>.

In 2009, when NI consumers were asked to review seven-day menus developed in England, they made few changes<sup>(12)</sup>. The major change was a move to a higher quality cut of meat purchased in a butcher’s shop. When the menus developed in the current research are compared to the previous research, many similarities can be noted, but differences do exist, e.g. more fruit and fewer desserts are consumed in the current menus. Whether these changes are due to the 2014 menus being developed from the start by NI participants and that they are therefore a truer reflection of their food habits or due to changes in food preferences over time is unclear.

## 5 Key conclusions

- The validated and robust Consensual Budget Standards methodology has been successfully used to provide data on the cost of a minimum essential but nutritionally adequate diet for two household types in Northern Ireland.
- The total weekly cost of the food basket for the two-parent and two-child household (pre-school and primary school) is £119.17. This equates to approximately £17 per day.
- The total weekly cost of the food basket for a pensioner living alone is £59.13, which equates to £8.44 per day.
- This study demonstrates the comparatively high cost of a food basket for a single person household.
- The sub-category of meat accounts for the largest share of the food basket.
- The minimum essential food basket would require a two-parent and two-child household to spend 35.23% of its total weekly income on the food basket if dependent on state benefits<sup>12</sup>.
- The minimum essential food basket would require a pensioner living alone to spend 36.12% of household income on the food basket if dependent on the state pension<sup>13</sup>.
- This pilot research demonstrates that there is a social and cultural aspect to food and that spending on takeaways and extra for visitors and Christmas is an important part of the food basket for both households.
- This pilot study can be used alongside other cost-of-living data as a benchmark to assess the adequacy of benefits, tax credits and the minimum wage rate. Furthermore, the results of this research can be used to contribute to debates on income adequacy, food poverty and poverty issues more generally.
- This research once again highlights that food is regarded as a flexible component of a household budget.

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<sup>12</sup> Income is based on a hypothetical scenario and is typical take-home income for this two-parent and two-child household type in a particular scenario, and subject to a number of conditions.

<sup>13</sup> Income is based on a hypothetical scenario and is typical take-home income for this pensioner living alone household type in a particular scenario, subject to a number of conditions.

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## Appendix 1 – List of VPSJ research reports

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MacMahon, B, Weld, G & Thornton, R (forthcoming in 2015) *Minimum Essential Food Costs An Analysis of the Minimum Essential Food Basket for Six Household Types 2006–2014*.

## Appendix 2 – Final Shopping Lists

Household Type – Family: two adults and two children, one in pre-school (aged 2-4) and one in primary school (aged 6-11)

Item	Size	Unit	Brand	Retailer	Unit Price	Quantity	Life Span	Cost per week
Bananas	5	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.89	3	1.0 Week	£ 2.67
Oranges	4	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.76	2	1.0 Week	£ 1.52
Apples	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	2	1.0 Week	£ 3.00
Plums	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.20	5	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Kiwis	5	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	2	1.0 Week	£ 2.00
Pears	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.75	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.75
Pineapple	227	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.50	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.50
Tomatoes	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.69	2	1.0 Week	£ 1.38
Mushrooms	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Peppers (red)	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.60	2	1.2 Weeks	£ 1.03
White Onions	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.16	4	1.0 Week	£ 0.64
Garlic (1 bulb)	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.30	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.08
Carrots	1	kg	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.80	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.80
Cabbage	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.59	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.59
Leeks	1	stick	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.40	4	1.0 Week	£ 1.60
Celery	1	bunch	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.80	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.80
Cucumber	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.49	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.49
Lettuce	1	head	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.40	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.40
Potatoes	2,500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.75	1	1.1 Weeks	£ 1.60



## The cost of a healthy food basket

Frozen bag of peas	1,000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.60	1	2.4 Weeks	£ 0.67
Mushy peas	300	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.30	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.30
Frozen bag of broccoli	900	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.10	1	2.0 Weeks	£ 0.55
Tin Tomatoes	400	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.39	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.39
Tin of baked beans	415	g	Heinz	Tesco	£ 0.68	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.68
Frozen oven chips	1,500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	2.9 Weeks	£ 0.53
Chicken for roasting (large)	1		Butcher	Butcher	£ 5.66	1	1.0 Week	£ 5.66
Pork Chop	6		Butcher	Butcher	£ 5.34	1	1.0 Week	£ 5.34
Beef for stir-fry	1	lb	Butcher	Butcher	£ 4.85	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 3.64
Beef steak for stewing	2	lb	Butcher	Butcher	£ 6.46	1	1.0 Week	£ 6.46
Shin bones for soup	1		Butcher	Butcher	Free	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.00
Mince meat	1	lb	Butcher	Butcher	£ 3.06	1	1.0 Week	£ 3.06
Rashers/bacon	8	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.55	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 1.91
Sausages	8	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.39	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 1.04
Black pudding	200	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.89	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 0.67
Ham	10	slices	Tesco	Tesco	£ 3.00	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 2.40
Tin of tuna	4	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 3.40	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 2.55
Fish fingers	10	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	2.5 Weeks	£ 0.40
Frozen white fish	4	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.00	1	2.0 Weeks	£ 1.00
Porridge	500	g	Flahavans	Tesco	£ 1.13	1	6.3 Weeks	£ 0.18
Weetabix	24	pack	Wheetabix	Tesco	£ 2.39	1	3.4 Weeks	£ 0.70
Cornflakes	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	1.4 Weeks	£ 1.07
Ready brek	450	g	Wheetabix	Tesco	£ 2.00	1	10.0 Weeks	£ 0.20
Cream crackers	25	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.27	1	1.8 Weeks	£ 0.15
Wholemeal bread	800	g	Harvest Pride	Tesco	£ 1.29	3	1.0 Week	£ 3.87
Potato Farfs	4	pack	Rankin	Tesco	£ 1.20	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 0.90

## The cost of a healthy food basket

Plain digestive biscuits	400	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.69	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.69
Mixed nuts	100	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.99	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.99
Pancakes	8	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.50
Noodles	250	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.20	3	1.3 Weeks	£ 2.70
Pasta	1,000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.30	1	5.5 Weeks	£ 0.24
Spaghetti	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.85	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 0.65
Milk semi skimmed	6,000	ml (3x2litres)		Local Shop	£ 4.35	1	0.9 Week	£ 4.61
Cheese	450	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 3.00	1	1.1 Weeks	£ 2.80
Dairylea triangles	8	pack	Dairylea	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 0.94
Eggs	12	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.95	1	0.9 Week	£ 2.28
Fromage frais	6	pack	Fromage Frais	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	0.9 Week	£ 1.75
Natural yogurt	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.10	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.10
Flora light spread	500	g	Flora	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.50
Sunflower oil	1,000	G (1 litre)	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	30.3 Weeks	£ 0.04
Black bean sauce	120	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.50	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 0.38
Apple Sauce	270	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.75	1	4.5 Weeks	£ 0.17
Gravy	500	g	Bisto	Tesco	£ 2.99	1	33.3 Weeks	£ 0.09
Mayonnaise	240	ml	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.50	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.13
Tomato ketchup	460	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.80	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.20
Marmalade	454	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.59	1	2.2 Weeks	£ 0.27
Jam	454	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.75	1	6.0 Weeks	£ 0.13
Salt	750	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.29	1	26.0 Weeks	£ 0.01
Pepper	25	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.60	1	26.0 Weeks	£ 0.02
Stock cubes	12	pack	Oxo	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	12.0 Weeks	£ 0.10
Tin of mixed herbs	14	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.75	1	12.0 Weeks	£ 0.06
Vinegar	568	ml	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.44	1	13.0 Weeks	£ 0.03

The cost of a healthy food basket

Sugar	1	kg	Silver Spoon	Tesco	£ 0.79	1	13.0 Weeks	£ 0.06
Tea bags	80		Punjana	Tesco	£ 2.29	1	1.7 Weeks	£ 1.35
Coffee	200	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.95	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.49
Hot Chocolate/Cocoa	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.48	1	41.7 Weeks	£ 0.06
Orange squash	750	ml	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.89	1	6.0 Weeks	£ 0.15
Orange Juice	4	x 1 litre pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 3.40	1	1.6 Weeks	£ 2.13
Apple pie	1		Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Ice cream	2,000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.70	1	14.8 Weeks	£ 0.11
Crisps	20	pack	Walkers	Tesco	£ 3.99	1	5.0 Weeks	£ 0.80
KitKat	16	pack	Nestle	Tesco	£ 2.69	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 2.02
School lunch	1		school	school	£ 2.40	3	1.4 Weeks	£ 5.12
School milk	1		school	school	£ 1.00	1	1.4 Weeks	£ 0.71
Takeaway	1			Local takeaway	£ 20.00	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 5.00
Extra for Christmas	1				£ 60.00	1	52.0 Weeks	£ 1.15
<b>Total food</b>								<b>£ 110.68</b>
<b>Alcohol at home</b>								
Box of Beer	20	pack	Fosters	Tesco	£ 15.00	1	3.3 Weeks	£ 4.50
Bottle of Wine	1		The Vineyards	Tesco	£ 3.99	1	1.0 Week	£ 3.99
<b>Total Alcohol</b>								<b>£ 8.49</b>
<b>Total food and Alcohol at home</b>								<b>£ 119.17</b>

The cost of a healthy food basket

Household Type – Pensioner living alone

Item	Size	Unit	Brand	Retailer	Unit Price	Quantity	Life Span	Cost per week
Bananas	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.12	3	1.0 Week	£ 0.36
Oranges	4	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.76	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.76
Apples	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	2.0 Weeks	£ 0.75
Grapefruit	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.40	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.40
Pears	1	Tin	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.75	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.75
Tomatoes	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.69	1	1.5 Weeks	£ 0.46
Mushrooms	250	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Peppers	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.60	2	1.0 Week	£ 1.20
White Onions	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.16	3	1.0 Week	£ 0.48
Red Onion	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.18	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.18
Garlic (1 bulb)	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.30	1	3.3 Weeks	£ 0.09
Carrots	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.08	7	1.0 Week	£ 0.56
Cabbage	1	loose	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.59	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.59
Leeks	1	stick	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.40	4	1.0 Week	£ 1.60
Celery	1	bunch	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.80	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.80
Cucumber	1	half	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.35	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.35
Lettuce	1	head	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.40	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.40
Potatoes	2,500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.75	1	2.9 Weeks	£ 0.60
Peas frozen	1,000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.60	1	33.3 Weeks	£ 0.05
Mushy peas frozen	1,000	g	Lockwood's	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	25.0 Weeks	£ 0.05
Broccoli frozen	900	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.10	1	10.6 Weeks	£ 0.10
Sweetcorn frozen	1,000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	33.3 Weeks	£ 0.04
Tin Tomatoes	400	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.39	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.10
Tin of baked beans	150	g	Heinz	Tesco	£ 0.45	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.45

The cost of a healthy food basket

Frozen oven chips	1,500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	18.2 Weeks	£ 0.08
Chicken for roasting (small)	1		Butcher	Butcher	£ 2.59	1	1.0 Week	£ 2.59
Pork chop	1		Butcher	Butcher	£ 0.89	2	1.0 Week	£ 1.78
Beef steak for stewing	1	lb	Butcher	Butcher	£ 3.23	1	1.0 Week	£ 3.23
Shin bones for soup	1		Butcher	Butcher	Free	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.00
Mince	1	lb	Butcher	Butcher	£ 3.06	1	1.3 Weeks	£ 2.30
Rashers/bacon	8	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.55	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.64
Sausages	8	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.39	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.35
Ham	100	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.5 Weeks	£ 0.67
Tin of tuna	160	g	Princes	Tesco	£ 1.99	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.99
Frozen white fish	4	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.00	1	8.0 Weeks	£ 0.25
Lentils	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.53	1	6.3 Weeks	£ 0.08
Porridge	500	g	Flahavans	Tesco	£ 1.13	1	6.3 Weeks	£ 0.18
Weetabix	24	pack	Weetabix	Tesco	£ 2.39	1	6.0 Weeks	£ 0.40
Wholemeal bread	400	g	Harvest Pride	Tesco	£ 0.69	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.69
Bread Roll	1		Local Shop	Tesco	£ 0.25	1	0.5 Week	£ 0.50
Plain digestive biscuits	400	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.69	1	2.7 Weeks	£ 0.26
Semi sweet biscuits	200	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.39	1	5.0 Weeks	£ 0.08
Spaghetti	500	g	Napolina	Tesco	£ 1.05	1	6.7 Weeks	£ 0.16
Rice	1000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.39	1	16.4 Weeks	£ 0.08
Milk semi skimmed	2000	ml		Tesco	£ 1.45	1	0.9 Week	£ 1.67
Cheese	160	g	Low Low	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	2.7 Weeks	£ 0.56
Eggs	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.2 Weeks	£ 0.83
Yogurt	6	pack	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.5 Weeks	£ 0.67
Flora light spread	500	g	Flora	Tesco	£ 1.50	1	3.3 Weeks	£ 0.45
Sunflower oil	1000	ml (1 litre)	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	30.3 Weeks	£ 0.04

The cost of a healthy food basket

Gravy	500	g	Bisto	Tesco	£ 2.99	1	100.0 Weeks	£ 0.03
Mayonnaise	240	ml	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.50	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 0.13
Tomato ketchup	460	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.80	1	8.0 Weeks	£ 0.10
White sauce	1	sachet	Colmans	Tesco	£ 0.70	1	2.0 Weeks	£ 0.35
Curry sauce	1		Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Salt	750	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.29	1	26.0 Weeks	£ 0.01
Pepper	25	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.60	1	52.0 Weeks	£ 0.01
Beef stock cubes	12	pack	Oxo	Tesco	£ 1.25	1	12.0 Weeks	£ 0.10
Tin of mixed herbs	14	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.75	1	26.0 Weeks	£ 0.03
Vinegar	568	ml	Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.44	1	17.0 Weeks	£ 0.03
Sugar	1000	g	Silver Spoon	Tesco	£ 0.79	1	26.0 Weeks	£ 0.03
Tea bags	80		Punjana	Tesco	£ 2.29	1	5.7 Weeks	£ 0.40
Coffee	200	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.95	1	7.7 Weeks	£ 0.25
Hot chocolate/cocoa	500	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 2.48	1	6.3 Weeks	£ 0.40
Apple pie	1		Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 1.00
Ice cream	2000	g	Tesco	Tesco	£ 1.70	1	26.7 Weeks	£ 0.06
Cake e.g. sponge	1		Tesco	Tesco	£ 0.68	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.68
Bun/pastry	1		Local Shop	Local Shop	£ 0.65	1	1.0 Week	£ 0.65
Eating out	1			Local Restaurant	£ 15.00	1	4.0 Weeks	£ 3.75
Takeaway	1			Local takeaway	£ 6.00	1	2.0 Weeks	£ 3.00
Extra for Christmas	1				£ 25.00	1	52.0 Weeks	£ 0.48
Food and drink total								<b>£ 45.14</b>
Bottle of wine	1		The Vineyards	Tesco	£ 3.99	1	1.0 Week	£ 3.99
Additional for Visitors	1				£ 10.00	1	1.0 Week	£ 10.00
Final Total including Extra for Visitors								<b>£ 59.13</b>

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**HELPLINE**

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