



THIS MONTH:

The cost of fresh food

We test the perception that fresh food is more expensive than processed food

One of the phrases we often hear from people trying to lose weight is, 'but it's so expensive to eat fresh food'. Superficially this may seem true but, when you look into it, buying fresh can be very cost effective, not to mention health and weight effective too. Fresh food is also less processed and has a lower carbon footprint.

The NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, recently released a study that reveals, despite a serious drought and recent floods, that fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods are much cheaper than junk food. It found healthy food was, on average, less than one-third of the price of junk food alternatives, when compared on a kilo by kilo basis. For example, the analysis found that processed fruit bars are \$25.80/kg, while apples are \$4.29/kg.

If you look at the kilojoule and nutrition levels of food as well, you will also find that fresh is best. A \$4.45 Big Mac has 2,000kj and 25.5g fat (9.7g sat) per serve. A homemade hamburger with the same ingredients, including two 100g patties, a low-fat cheese slice and

a wholemeal bun, is 1,846kj and 16g fat (7g sat) and comes to about \$3.00.

The good news is that some stores, such as Woolworths and Aldi, have introduced unit pricing that shows the price per kilo as well as the total price. You'll notice that the more processed a food is, the more it costs.

ANTI-VEGIES?

So why does this anti-fresh perception persist? 'The barrier comes from lack of planning,' says dietitian Susie Burrell. 'If you want to eat cheaper and cook with fresh foods you need to plan ahead and shop weekly – grabbing things last minute from corner shops is going to be more expensive. It's about prioritising the need to eat fresh, working out the best way to do that and making sure you don't get caught on the run.'

The other reason some people are prejudiced against fresh food and vegies is behaviour that has been programmed since childhood. 'Maybe you grew up in a house where your parents didn't cook and you lack confidence, or you are turned off because your



mum over-cooked the vegies,' says Susie. 'Often, when people think of vegies they think bland, steamed vegies beside grilled fish. Vegies can be dressed up with sauces and marinades in the same way as meat – vegies with a sauce made with low-fat cheese are tasty and healthy.'

'At the end of the day, if you want to lose weight and avoid cancer, you just have to find a way to incorporate fresh food and vegies into your diet – whether it's as a juice, a soup, or mixed into other dishes.'

SHOPPING TIPS:

- Buy seasonal produce – it's fresher and cheaper.
- Buy fresh vegies and rice or pasta in bulk and on special. Split the cost between two households.
- Chop seasonal fruits and freeze or stew in individual portions.
- Cook and freeze

vegie-based pasta sauces in individual portions.

- Roast leftover vegies such as carrot, zucchini, sweet potato, pumpkin, capsicum and onion and add to pasta, salads and sandwiches.
- Write a shopping list and stick to it. Research shows people with shopping lists spend less money.
- Avoid pre-cooked pasta and rice dishes as they will be more costly.
- If fresh vegies are in short supply and expensive, check out frozen or canned alternatives.
- Add vegies, kidney beans or lentils to meat dishes to bulk them up cheaply and add nutrients and fibre.
- Check the price per kilo on meat labels. Pre-cut stir-fry strips cost more than a larger piece that you cut up yourself.
- Goods such as ham or cheese in the deli are often cheaper per kilo than those pre-packaged in the chiller section. **S&H**