

Eating Healthier With More Plants: A Cost Comparison

Following a whole food plant-based (WFPB) dietary lifestyle is an evidence-based way to treat and prevent expensive chronic diseases, and can even reverse existing diseases. The goal of this handout is to compare the costs of three different diets. While all three are similar in cost, WFPB may have a long-term savings benefit.

Standard American Diet (SAD)

Eaten by most people in the United States. Over 60% of all calories consumed in the US are highly refined and ultra-processed foods. SAD has 32% of calories from meat/eggs, with only 11% from whole grains, beans, fruits, vegetables and nuts. Overall, this eating pattern is higher in salt, saturated fat, sugar and lower in fiber and nutrients.¹ The SAD tends to be nutrient-poor and is associated with many chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

Mediterranean Diet

The traditional diet of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Most of these meals are nutrient-rich and plant-based (i.e. legumes - beans/peas/lentils, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains), defined more by their inclusion of fish and red wine and olive oil. A small amount of dairy used as a condiment (i.e. Feta) and chicken may be included. Processed foods and red meat are either rarely eaten or not at all. This pattern of eating has been shown to protect against some chronic diseases (i.e. cancer, heart disease and diabetes).²

Whole Food Plant-Based (WFPB)

An eating pattern centered on eating primarily minimally processed and whole foods, consisting of: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, other legumes, nuts, and seeds.³ These whole foods make this a very nutrient-dense meal plan. Oils are either completely excluded or used sparingly. Ultra-processed foods, including those that are plant-based are used minimally or not at all. Evidence has demonstrated that this eating pattern can prevent, reverse, or significantly improve the impact of multiple chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.

WHAT AMERICA EATS



Poor nutrition is the leading cause of death globally

Increased risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers

WFPB EATING

Chronic disease treatment and potential reversal

Decreased risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers



Standard American Diet

Mediterranean Diet

Whole Food, Plant-Based

Breakfast

Oatmeal

½ cup Apples & Cinnamon
Instant oatmeal
½ cup whole dairy milk
1 cup hazelnut coffee
2 tbl coffee creamer
2 tsp white sugar

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$4.88 - \$12.42

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$19.52 - \$49.68

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
0 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
2 per serving

Oatmeal

½ cup old fashioned rolled oats
½ cup skim dairy milk
1 cup frozen blueberries
½ cup chopped apples
1 cup black coffee

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$1.65 - \$6.18

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$6.60 - \$24.72

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
2 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving

Oatmeal

½ cup old fashioned rolled oats
½ cup soymilk
1 cup frozen mixed berries
½ cup chopped apples
1 cup black coffee

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$2.65 - \$7.76

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$10.60 - \$31.04

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
2 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving



Lunch

Taco Bell Power Menu Bowl - Chicken (460 cal)

chicken, black beans, guacamole
seasoned rice, lettuce, tomatoes,
cheese, reduced fat sour cream,
avocado ranch sauce
sweet tea special

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$6.19 - \$6.81

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$24.76 - \$27.24

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
3 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
3 per serving

Taco Bell Power Menu Bowl - Veggie (420 cal)

black beans, guacamole
seasoned rice, lettuce,
tomatoes, cheese, reduced fat
sour cream, avocado ranch
sauce
sweet tea special

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$6.19 - \$6.81

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$24.76 - \$27.24

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
3 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
3 per serving

Taco Bell Power Menu Bowl - Veggie (310 cal)

black beans, guacamole
seasoned rice, lettuce,
tomatoes, no cheese, no sour
cream, no ranch sauce
iced tea special

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$6.19 - \$6.81

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$24.76 - \$27.24

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
3 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving



*We want to limit or avoid ultra-processed foods because they are not whole foods and include either extra sugar, fat, or salt and lack many nutrients.⁶

Use the Plant -
Based Jumpstart
Guide to start
eating more whole
plant foods today!





Standard American Diet

Mediterranean Diet

Whole Food, Plant-Based

Dinner



Spaghetti Bolognese

24 oz Extra Chunky pasta sauce
 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes, adjust to taste
 1/8 cup fresh basil and/or parsley
 1/4 lb spaghetti
 1/4 lb ground beef
 1/8 cup parmesan cheese
 1 slice Italian bread, 1/8 stick butter
 Salt and pepper, to taste

Spaghetti Bolognese

1/8 medium onion, finely diced
 1 clove of garlic, finely minced
 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes, adjust to taste
 1/4 medium carrot, finely diced
 1/2 rib celery, finely chopped
 1/8 medium bell pepper, finely diced
 1 oz white mushrooms, finely chopped
 4 oz canned crushed tomatoes, unsalted
 1/4 cup vegetable broth
 2 oz ground turkey
 1/8 cup fresh basil and/or parsley
 1/4 lb whole wheat spaghetti
 1 slice whole grain bread, 1 tbl extra virgin olive oil, & 1/8 cup parmesan

Spaghetti Bolognese

1/8 medium onion, finely diced
 1 clove of garlic, finely minced
 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes, adjust to taste
 1/4 medium carrot, finely diced
 1/2 rib celery, finely chopped
 1/8 medium bell pepper, finely diced
 1 oz white mushrooms, finely chopped
 4 oz canned crushed tomatoes, unsalted
 1/4 cup vegetable broth
 4 oz can cooked brown lentils, drained
 1/8 cup fresh basil and/or parsley
 1/4 lb whole wheat spaghetti

Price⁴/Serving⁵: \$3.06 - \$3.83

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$12.24 - \$15.32

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
.75 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
1 per serving

Price⁴/Serving⁵: \$4.07 - \$5.09

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$16.28 - \$20.36

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies :
2.2 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving

Price⁴/Serving⁵: \$3.86 - \$4.44

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$15.44 - \$17.76

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies :
3.6 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving

Snack



Jello Cup

Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$0.49 - \$0.61

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$1.96 - \$2.44

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
0 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
1 per serving

NOTE: Prices will vary based on your location and current food prices. We have provided a range that reflects food prices as of the spring of 2022.

Yogurt

1 Fruit-flavored Greek yogurt cup
5.3 oz

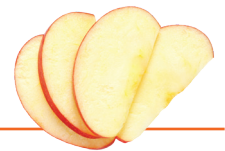
Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$0.62 - \$1.04

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$2.48 - \$4.16

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
0 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
1 per serving

Fresh Apple



Price⁴/Serving⁵:
\$0.68 - \$1.77

Price/Family of Four (4):
\$2.72 - \$7.08

Total Whole Fruits & Veggies:
1 per serving

Ultra-Processed Food Count*:
0 per serving

MONEY SAVING TIPS

01



Buy ingredients in bulk.

02



Plan different meals that use the same ingredients.

03



To make quick meals, buy frozen or canned vegetables and fruits (without added sugar or salt). Drain and rinse canned items to remove excess sodium or sugars.

04



Batch cook once for several meals. Safely store leftovers in the refrigerator for 5-7 days. Portion and freeze for long-term storage and busy days.

05



Buy dried beans or grains for greater cost savings over canned or boxed.

06



Buy fruit and vegetables in season.⁷

Sometimes, a WFPB meal can be slightly more expensive than a comparable SAD or Mediterranean meal. However, research shows that a WFPB diet can be more affordable than the SAD,⁸ in terms of personal health-related financial impact (costs) over time.

Following a WFPB lifestyle can prevent a number of expensive chronic diseases; this lifestyle can also be used to treat and reverse existing chronic diseases,⁹ thus reducing the costs related to treating those diseases compared to managing them with pills or procedures.

References

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7. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Seasonal Produce Guide. Published 2022.
8. Springmann M, Clark MA, Rayner M, Scarborough P, Webb P. The global and regional costs of healthy and sustainable dietary patterns: a modeling study. Lancet Plant Health. 2021.
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Seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider before making lifestyle changes. This material is not a substitute for professional medical advice.