

Retail prices of healthy foods rising: study

August 3 2010, by Mary Guiden

(PhysOrg.com) -- As the federal government prepares to issue its latest guidelines for healthy eating, UW researchers have found retail prices of the most nutritious foods are increasing at a higher rate than other foods.

"The rising disparity in the price of [healthful foods](#): 2004 -- 2008" [was published online](#) in [Food Policy](#) last month.

While all food prices have risen substantially between 2004 and 2008, the price of the most nutrient-dense foods has risen the fastest, said Pablo Monsivais, research scientist at the University of Washington's Center for [Public Health](#) Nutrition (CPHN) and lead investigator of the study. Nutrient-dense foods are those that deliver more nutrients per calorie, including [whole grains](#), lean meats, low fat dairy products, vegetables and fruit. These foods are singled out for "increased intake" in draft versions of the [2010 Dietary Guidelines](#).

"We found a nearly 30 percent increase in the retail price of nutrient-dense foods in four years," said Monsivais. This compares with a 16 percent increase for less-healthy foods including sweets, candy, soft drinks and fatty foods. "The findings have serious implications for national [dietary guidelines](#) and related policy discussions taking place in communities across the country."

Researchers looked at retail price data for 378 foods and beverages from major supermarket chains in Seattle, Wash. over the four-year timeframe. Selected foods are part of a database of a food frequency questionnaire developed by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research

Center and used previously in large-scale studies on diet and health. Supermarkets included in the study include Albertson's, Quality Food Centers (a subsidiary of Kroger) and Safeway.

"These new findings show that food cost may pose a barrier to people adopting healthier diets," said Monsivais, who added that findings are in line with previous CPHN studies. "This may limit the impact of national dietary guidelines." Adam Drewnowski, study director and co-author on the paper, agrees. "Dietary guidelines for all Americans ought to take food prices into account," he said.

The Center for Public Health Nutrition held a "Shopping for Health" conference in May 2010, bringing together public health agencies, supermarket representatives and policymakers from Washington state to discuss healthy foods, cost and new ways to identify healthy, affordable and sustainable foods. For more information on the center's research, [visit the web site](#).

Provided by University of Washington

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