

Cost of living and food price increases are leaving families without access to a healthy and affordable diet

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There has been a rapid 57% jump in the proportion of households cutting back on food or missing meals altogether in just three months, according to [new data](#) published by The Food Foundation.

The data, which was collected from an online survey and were analyzed independently by The Food Foundation and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, found that in the past month 12.8% of households (6.8 million adults) have had smaller meals than usual or skipped meals because they couldn't afford or get access to food. Additionally, 8.8% of households (4.6 million adults) reported having not eaten despite being hungry because they couldn't afford or get access to food, and 4.6% of households (2.4 million adults) have not eaten for a whole day because they couldn't afford or get access to food. In total, 13.8% of households (7.3 million adults) had one or more of these experiences in the past month.

There was also a sharp increase in the proportion of households with children experiencing [food insecurity](#) in the past month at 17.2% up from 12.1% in January 2022. This represents a total of 2.6 million children aged under 18 who live in households that do not have access to a healthy and affordable diet, putting them at high risk of suffering from diet-related diseases.

Being able to afford food is affected by other financial demands on households, and food is often the first expenditure to be cut when disposable income is tight. Families have been facing increasing pressure on their disposable income in recent months because of the rise in energy bills, petrol prices and background inflation, as well as the cost of food. Benefit levels were uprated by 3.1% in April, a rise far below the March inflation level of 7%. This means many families will simply not have sufficient income to afford enough food.

Soaring [food prices](#) (up 5.9% in the past 12 months) are making it

increasingly difficult for families to afford the food they need. There is also concern that prices of 'budget' ranges of [staple foods](#) may have increased at a faster rate, so the impact on [low-income families](#) may be worse. The increasing cost of living and rising food prices are likely to mean that people become more reliant on lower cost foods which tend to be calorie-dense and nutrient-poor, further increasing obesity and other diet-related diseases. Reducing food insecurity is essential if the Government is to achieve its Leveling Up mission to improve [healthy life expectancy](#) and reduce health disparities.

Genevieve Hadida, Research Assistant in Food Systems, Health and Sustainability at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: "Not being able to eat regularly or healthily has a devastating impact on health. We were shocked to see that rates of food insecurity have risen to rates similar to the very start of lockdown two years ago, particularly in those households with children. Rising food prices and reduced [disposable income](#) are resulting in an unsustainable lifestyle with many children not having access to a healthy or affordable diet—this cannot continue. Immediate action and close monitoring are required to prevent the most vulnerable families from falling through the cracks."

The researchers are calling on the UK government to make tackling food insecurity an urgent priority for action by:

1. Increasing benefits in line with inflation and ensuring employers pay at least the real living wage to ensure struggling families can pay essential bills
2. Setting out long-term action to build the resilience of our communities and our food system to shocks, within a Good Food Bill in the forthcoming National Food Strategy White Paper
3. Rebalancing food prices so [healthy food](#) is the most affordable
4. Expanding Free School Meals, breakfast provision and Healthy

Start to protect children from obesity and so all children in poverty benefit

Anna Taylor, Executive Director of The Food Foundation, said: "The extremely rapid rise in food insecurity since January points to a catastrophic situation for families. Food insecurity puts families under extreme mental stress and forces people to survive on the cheapest calories which lead to health problems. The situation is rapidly turning from an economic crisis to a health crisis. Food banks cannot possibly be expected to solve this. The government needs to realize the boat is sinking for many families and it needs to be fixed. Bailing out with emergency [food](#) parcels is not going to work."

More information: Food Insecurity Tracking. [The Food Foundation.](#)

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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