

November 2021

A nest egg with a difference - More bang for your nutritional and financial buck

With food prices rocketing it is making it that much harder for low- and middle-income people to feed a family properly. The price of the average household food basket has increased by R98.08 from September 2021 to October 2021 and a staggering R400.83 from October 2020 to October 2021.

The Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity group was quoted recently saying they predict that food prices will continue to rise into 2022, which will put severe pressure on households with a low income, while jobs remain scarce. Monthly food expenses eat up a substantial portion of income, which will be made even worse by higher food prices, higher electricity prices and increased taxi fares.

Sbusiso Kumalo, Chief Marketing Officer at African Bank, agrees strongly with the group when they say that when food gets too expensive for low-income families to afford, we remain in an emergency food crisis which is set to deepen. "It is one of the reasons we recently partnered with local NGO, INMED SA, on a seeds for life programme in the Eastern Cape to encourage more communities to start developing home food gardens." The problem is not only that people are going hungry, but what is on their plate when there is food, often lacks any nutritional diversity.

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), the food poverty line is now R624, the minimum amount of money a South African needs per month to afford food that supplies the minimum required daily energy intake of 8,820kJ. So, with high concerns around adequate nutrition, particularly with children, we looked at some of the more affordable nutrient rich food one could spend wisely on and were surprised at just how much value eggs add to one's daily diet.

Eggs are a classic example of a nutrient-rich food that deserves more appreciation for the nutrition that it contributes to a healthy and balanced diet. "And in these challenging financial times, in a very cost-effective manner, too," says Kumalo.

Eggs: A Nutrient-Rich Food

Food scientists and dietitians refer to eggs as being nutrient-dense. This means that a food is rich in healthy nutrients like protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, while being low in the nutrients that we want to minimise, like excessive amounts of saturated fats, added sugars, and salt (sodium).

Eggs: Help Us Meet Our Nutrient Needs

In a large, well-known study called the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) on over 20 000 participants, it was shown that egg eaters had a higher likelihood of meeting and even exceeding their nutrient needs. For example, egg eaters tended to eat more protein and more healthy fats. Egg eaters also ate more iron, zinc, calcium, selenium, and choline, nutrients which are often neglected in our diets.

Eggs: Nutritional Value for Money

It is widely accepted that eggs add a bang for your buck when it comes to a healthy and balanced diet. Eggs are a cost-effective source of protein, minerals like iron and zinc, and the vitamins A, B2 and B12. This was confirmed in a recent study that ranked whole eggs the third most cost-effective food after dairy and grains. In children, eggs also ranked as the most cost-effective food for delivering protein, choline, and vitamin A and the third most cost-effective food for vitamin D. In adults, eggs were the most cost-effective food for protein and choline, second most cost effective for vitamin A, and third most cost effective for vitamin D.

In these financially challenging times, it is reassuring to see the sunny side of eggs as a cost-effective food with excellent nutritional value for your money.

Now if you team eggs with the following food basket, you'll not only have a nutritious selection but one that may fit your budget as well.

Monique Piderit, registered dietitian, and PhD student at the University of Pretoria, suggests the following 10 items for a well-rounded basket of cost-effective goods with maximum goodness:

1. Tinned pilchards – Contains protein and healthy omega-3 fats, the same fats found in super pricey salmon.
2. Dried beans, chickpeas, and lentils – Contain fibre as well as plant protein and immune supporting zinc. These are VAT-exempt in SA to be more affordable. Use to bulk up stews, soups, and meat dishes like mince.
3. Samp – A source of energy.
4. Tinned baked beans - Contain fibre as well as plant protein.
5. Brown bread (VAT subsidised by the government) – Bread is a source of energy.
6. Potatoes – Potatoes are a source of energy. Potatoes can last for ages, as they don't spoil easily, if they are stored correctly. If you keep potatoes in a cool, dark, dry place and buy in bulk too, the savings are even more. Potatoes are a high-quality energy source. Keep the skin on when you peel potatoes, the fibre content is almost halved.
7. Peanut butter – Contain heart healthy monounsaturated fats.
8. Carrots, butternut, spinach – Some of the most cost-effective vegetables.
9. Popcorn kernels – A high fibre snack/ treat to replace more costly crisps.
10. Water – Plain water is great for hydration with no added sugar or energy.

The last word comes from Kumalo who reminds us that just like your nutritional health, when it comes to your financial health, don't put all your eggs in one basket. "A diversified portfolio always yields the best returns if you are starting to build a retirement nest egg," he concludes.

ENDS

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