

Simple steps to better diet



Gaye Godkin

UNHEALTHY food is food that is highly processed, high in sugars, refined carbohydrates, health-damaging fats, and devoid of nutrients and fibre. It costs less because junk food is cheap to produce and generally has a massive marketing budget to target poorly-educated consumers.

Contrary to popular belief, the consumption of food from fast-food outlets accounts for very little of our overall spend on food. Over 80pc of calories are consumed in the home, hence the importance of what is placed in the supermarket trolley.

New research from the Harvard School of Public Health has shown that the healthiest diet costs just \$1.50 more per day than the least healthy diet. Over one year, this increases food costs by \$550 (€405) per person.

This is the first study of its kind to systematically evaluate the evidence and cost of healthy eating.

The researchers found that healthier food choices did cost more but the difference was less than expected.

Pizza is the fastest-growing fast food in Ireland. Pasta is now passing out the traditional spud and Coca-Cola remains the

number one brand again for 2013.

These foods are high in carbohydrates and sugars and have a direct

association with poor health.

Low-fat, no fat products are gaining wider spaces on the supermarket shelves and they come with a greater cost.

There is no real science to support the consumption of low-fat foods, versus whole foods in their natural state. When fat is removed it is generally replaced with sugars and refined carbohydrate fillers.

Fat is an important component in the human diet. Fats in general are demonised and blamed for many of our health problems. This message is confusing, incorrect and complicating food choices.

Consuming fats is vital for our overall health and well-being. Without adequate amounts of fat in the diet we can become

deficient in vital fat soluble nutrients such as vitamin D, vitamin A, vitamin E and vitamin K.

Omega 3 is an essential fat which is chronically lacking in the diet, the best source of omega 3 is oily fish. Eating oily fish, such as mackerel, three times per week will feed the brain, help alleviate depression, prevent high blood pressure, support vision, protect your joints and is cardio-protective. It is an inexpensive fish and is now in season.

Tinned fish is also a very nutritious low-cost food, particularly important for the elderly.

The Mediterranean diet is rich in good fats, such as olive oil, avocados, nuts and fish which confer major health benefits. Consuming nuts as a daily snack can reduce the incidence of heart disease.

Lidl stocks nuts of excellent quality at a low price. Always choose nuts packed in sealed bags that are not see through. Best choices are walnuts, almonds, pecan, brazil nuts, hazelnuts and

almonds. Processed plastic meats are not good. They are high in sodium, nitrates and preservatives and do not form part of a healthy diet.

Red meat has gained undue bad press. Grass-fed Irish beef and lamb are packed full of nutrients which are lacking in the Irish diet. Iron deficiency remains a common problem among all ages, with 23pc of one-year-old children iron deficient, according to the 2012 pre-school nutrition survey. Teenage girls, pre-menopausal women and the elderly are most at risk of anaemia.

Red meat is the most bioavailable source of iron which is vital for energy and brain function. Choose lean beef such as shin beef for stews and casseroles. There is no need to buy expensive cuts.

Aim to incorporate lots of plant foods when consuming red meat. By adding lentils or pulses and a variety of root vegetables to a casserole you are improving the nutrient value of the meal and increasing the fibre content.

Liver is a nutritional powerhouse. It is packed with vitamins and minerals.

Gaye Godkin is a consultant nutritionist. Her website is www.gayegodkin.ie.

Case study: Karen O'Brien

Charlie Weston

GETTING good value for products and services that her family buys is important for Karen O'Brien.

A former markets trader with Ulster Bank, she has no fear when it comes to questioning companies about what they offer and making sure her family gets plenty of bang for its buck.

"I just ring around for everything. I price everything and I am not afraid to do it," the homemaker, who lives in Lusk, Co Dublin, says.

In the past few years she has switched the family's health cover from VHI to Aviva, and now the O'Briens are with Laya Healthcare.

Ms O'Brien and her husband Noel have three children - Ellen (18), Lauren (14) and Rory (13). All three are in secondary school in nearby Skerries.

The family moved to Laya's Essential Connect Family scheme, a switch that saved them close to €500 and saw the children get better cover.

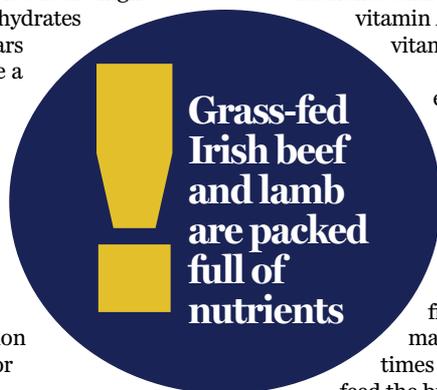
When they were with Aviva the O'Briens had split their cover, putting the children on different plans to the adults. The Laya cover for the family costs them €2,050.

Mr O'Brien is a management accountant with Aer Lingus, and Ms O'Brien works in the home and makes sure to get value for money for the family.

She says she is an inveterate switcher, with regular moves made to ensure the best value electricity, gas and broadband supplier.

Ms O'Brien reckons it is a generational thing, as she points out that her parents had to be persuaded recently of the value of switching.

"I always make sure I get a good price. I find it is worth the effort to check out what is available," she says.



Proper nutrition is best insurance policy

NUTRITION surveys tell us that the average Irish person eats only two to three portions of fruit and vegetables daily.

Fruit and vegetables are rich in antioxidants.

Eating a couple of apples daily can reduce cholesterol and are a super digestive aid.

Vegetables are simply medicine from the plant kingdom and a wonderful source of fibre, which is important to support a healthy digestive system.

It slows down the absorption of glucose from food and is cardio protective. A diet high in plant foods has been shown to confer many health benefits including cancer prevention and a healthy body weight.

Many people shy away from vegetables because they take time to prepare. It is imperative



that we include vegetables into the winter diet. Frozen is okay. By keeping your freezer stocked with frozen spinach, peas, broad beans and sweet corn you can prepare a quick healthy supper. All other vegetables taste

better consumed fresh.

We live on a green island and have ambitious plans to feed the world with our 'Agriculture 2020' policy.

However, we fail to nourish our own people.

Due to the lack of a national nutrition plan, many consumers are confused as to what is healthy.

According to Health Minister James Reilly, eight out of 10 people attend their GP or are admitted to hospital due to a diet or lifestyle-related condition.

We have a disease-based model of healthcare.

Eating a healthy diet is your best health insurance policy. This is where we need to begin addressing our soaring healthcare costs.