

# Edinburgh Community Food on Food poverty

By Dagmara Lukowiec, Food and Health Development Worker at Edinburgh Community Food.

Nowadays the term food poverty is regularly used in the media, mostly in relation to food banks. As a result, we tend to assume that this term is reserved for people who are in need of food aid and that food poverty simply means that not enough food is available. However, this term has a much broader meaning. Food poverty is a major contributing factor to poor health and many of us are likely to be experiencing food poverty without even realising it.

## **So, what is food poverty?**

Although there are many definitions of food poverty, all of them refer to the lack of a healthy diet.

To have a healthy diet means eating the right amount of food for energy needs as well as consuming a wide range of foods in order to obtain all the nutrients needed to maintain a good quality of life.

☒ That is why it is recommended that we:

- eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, which are full of the vitamins and minerals needed for our bodies to function properly
- consume wholegrain starchy foods such as grains, breads, pasta and oats as part of every meal to get energy we need and fibre to maintain regular bowel function
- include some milk and dairy products to provide our bodies with calcium for strong bones and protein for growth
- have a moderate amount of meat, fish, eggs and alternatives needed for their protein, mineral and vitamin content

Not being able to access or afford all the ingredients needed for a nutritious diet means people are often forced to choose food for its quantity rather than quality. As a result, people eat fewer foods and more low-nutrient density convenience foods such as cheap meat products, chips, biscuits, cakes and sugary drinks. These foods are high in calories, saturated fat, salt and sugar but low in essential nutrients. This is effectively a poor diet which puts people at risk of overweight and obesity – particularly when their intake from food and drink exceeds the energy they use. People consuming an unhealthy diet are more likely to suffer from diet related diseases including: type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, certain types of cancers and premature death.

### **So what are the reasons for food poverty?**

The cost of food products is often the most obvious factor with regard to what people can buy. However, a lack of proper grocery shops in the neighborhood, or the availability of a range of healthy goods in local convenience shops are in fact very common reasons for people facing food poverty. There are also other aspects which affect the ability to obtain a healthy diet and good health even when nutritious foods are available.

Many of us have:

- a lack of knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet
- a lack of skills and means necessary to prepare healthy meals
- a lack of interest in making healthy living a priority

### **Overcoming barriers to eating healthily**

It is possible to overcome some of the problems mentioned above. However, it takes know-how.

Here are some useful tips:

1. As we have pointed out in previous articles, there is no need to choose expensive so-called 'super foods' to get a

healthy diet.

2. Back to basics – the shops own ‘basics’ range products are generally the same as the standard ranges but with less fancy packaging.

3. Discount and frozen food shops offer great value on fruit and vegetables.

4. Frozen vegetables are generally cheaper, just as nutritious, and are often pre-chopped, saving money and time. They are perfect for soups and stews.

5. Some vegetables are always very cheap. It is good to ‘bulk out’ a meal with plenty of onions, carrots, cabbage, potatoes, turnips and frozen peas.

6. Meat can be the most expensive part of the grocery shopping. Beans and pulses are great and much cheaper alternatives to meat. Tinned beans can be added to stews, casseroles, soups, pasta dishes and curries. Lentils are best in soups and added to stews or salads.

7. Frugal tins – stocking up on tinned products such as vegetables and beans saves money and time. The best are those without added salt and sugar but if they are not available rinsing them will help.

8. Local food co-ops offer good quality fresh produce that can be bought in loose weight and is often cheaper than in the supermarket.

9. Edinburgh Community Food (ECF) sells fruit, vegetables, milk, bread, eggs, jam and packets of nuts and orders can be delivered or picked up from us.

Please contact us at [admin@edinburghcommunityfood.org.uk](mailto:admin@edinburghcommunityfood.org.uk) if you are interested in finding out more.

10. Cooking from scratch is generally cheaper and much healthier than eating ready meals. ECF runs cooking classes regularly and is a great source for healthy and easy to follow recipes!

Submitted by [Dagmara Lukowiec, Food and Health Development Worker](#)

