PUBLIC HEALTH

The cost of a healthy diet

Lancet Glob. Health [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(19\)30447-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(19)30447-4)

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A shift to healthier diets is essential to achieve global goals for human health and environmental sustainability. The EAT-Lancet commission produced a universal healthy reference diet aimed at improving health while sustaining the environment. How affordable is this diet for the world's population?

Kalle Hirvonen and colleagues examined the affordability of the EAT-Lancet commission reference diet using retail prices from 2011 for 744 foods in 159 countries and comparing total diet cost per day to each country's mean per capita household income. They found that, although this reference diet is affordable for people in developed countries, it is unaffordable for the world's poor and is on average 60% more expensive than the minimum cost of nutrient adequacy. For half a billion people

living in low-income countries, the EAT-Lancet diet would cost almost 90% of the mean per capita household income. The diet would also cost more than 50% of the mean per capita household income of the nearly three billion people living in lower-middle income countries. Across countries, the diet's cost would exceed the total per capita household income for more than 1.5 billion people.

Making the EAT-Lancet diet more affordable, the authors argue, will require a combination of solutions, including higher incomes, lower prices and nutrition assistance.

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Published online: 10 January 2020
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0817-x>