

FOOD AND LOW INCOME

Jamie Oliver's comments about the poor diets of many people on low incomes have attracted a great deal of comment. This briefing provides background information on the relationship between low income and diet.

Consumption of Fruit and Vegetables

Consumption of at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables is closely associated with health benefits such as reduced risk of diabetes, heart and other cardio-vascular disease and mental well-being.

The Welsh Health Survey 2011¹ shows that 33% of the population eat 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day. However there is a marked difference between socio-economic groups. Only 22% of people who are unemployed or who have never worked eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily, compared with 37 per cent of people in professional and managerial jobs (Table 1).

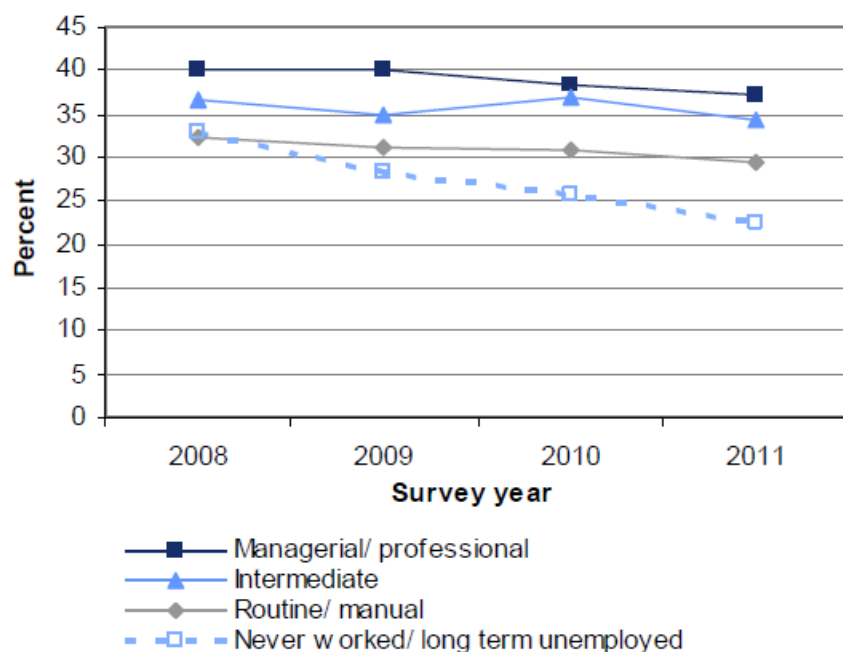
Table 1 Percentage eating guideline amounts of fruit and vegetables

Socio-economic group	Percentage complying
Managerial & professional	37
Intermediate	34
Routine & manual	29
Never worked & long-term unemployed	22
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011 quintile	
1 (least deprived)	36
2	36
3	33
4	30
5 (most deprived)	28

Source: Welsh Health Survey (2011) Health-related Lifestyle, Table 4.3

The proportion of people eating 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day has declined in Wales between 2008 and 2011. While consumption decreased slightly in all socio-economic groups, it was greatest amongst people who are unemployed or have never worked (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Trends in adults consuming five or more portions of fruit and vegetables by socio-economic group (age standardised)

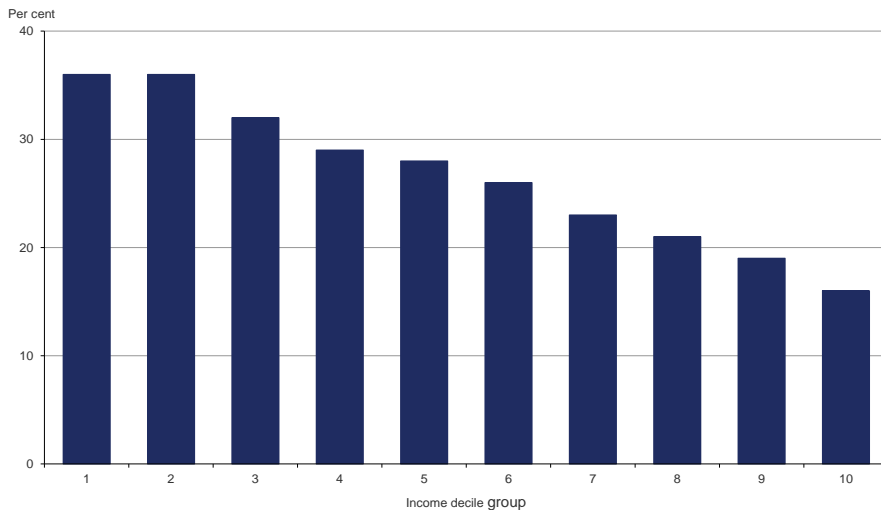


Source: Welsh Government (2012) **Trends in health-related lifestyle in Wales: Welsh Health Survey 2003/4-2011**, SB 87/2012.
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/120919sb872012en.pdf>

Low income household expenditure on food

The ONS Family Spending Survey² shows that, on average, families in the lowest income decile spend just £37.30 a week on food and drink, compared with £72.10 spent by the highest income group (these figures are adjusted for household size - the unadjusted gap is even bigger).

Food and drink accounts for a much higher proportion of household spending in the poorest families compared with the richest. Together with housing and fuel costs, food and drink accounted for more than a third (36 per cent) of the outgoings of the poorest 20 per cent of households, but just an eighth (16 per cent) of the best off 10 per cent.³

Figure 2 Percentage of total expenditure on Food by income decile, 2011

Source: Family Spending Survey, 2012

Food Price Inflation

The cost of food has risen faster than many other items.

Since 2005, the Consumer Price Index has risen from 100 to 121.2, but the price of food has increased by much more than this, with "seasonal food" (including fruit and vegetables) showing some of the biggest increases. Seasonal food is up from an index of 100 in 2005 to 140.2 in 2011. Non-processed food has increased in price nearly as much, up to 137.8.⁴

The combination of low expenditure and rising prices is resulting in high levels of anxiety about food costs. According to a survey by Which?, 88 per cent of all households say they are worried by rising food costs, with more than half saying it is difficult to eat healthily.⁵

The impact of high food prices on eating healthily is evident if the cost of a basket of fruit and vegetables is considered. One person requires at least 35 portions of fruit and vegetables a week (5 portions x 7 days); a family of four would require 140 portions (35 portions x 4) a week.

Buying this quantity of fruit and vegetables is not cheap. The basket of goods below cost £8.34 from ASDA online on Monday 2nd September 2013, and provides about 55 portions - less than is required by two people and less than half the requirement of a family of four:

- Pack of 6 salad tomatoes – 75p (6 portions)
- 2 iceberg lettuce @ 50p each - £1 (8 portions)
- Pack of 3 peppers - £1 (6 portions)
- Cucumber – 50p (5 portions)
- Kilo of Golden Delicious apples – £2.19 (6 portions)
- 5 bananas - £1 (5 portions)
- Kilo of broccoli - £2 (10 portions – assuming 100g per portion and no waste)
- Kilo of carrots - £0.90 (10 portions – assuming 100g per portion and no waste).

Conclusion

The underlying problem is that people on low incomes do not have enough money to buy healthy food AND do the other ordinary things in life.

REFERENCES

¹ Welsh Government (2012) Welsh Health Survey 2011 **Health-Related Lifestyle, Chapter 3 Table 4.3**. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2012/120919/?lang=en>

² Office for National Statistics (2012) **Family Spending, 2012** Chapter 3 – Equivalised Income. Available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-spending/family-spending/family-spending-2012-edition/index.html>

³ ONS **Family Spending, 2012**. Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-spending/family-spending/family-spending-2012-edition/chd-figure-3-5.xls>

⁴ ONS **Consumer Price Index 2012**, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/cpi/consumer-price-indices/july-2013/consumer-price-inflation-reference-tables.xls>

⁵ Which? (2013) The impact of rising food prices. <http://www.which.co.uk/documents/pdf/the-impact-of-rising-food-prices-which-report-259301.pdf>