

New affordable nutrition index is first measurement tool to evaluate affordable nutrition

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A new food rating system that analyzes both nutrition and cost value of food may now make it easier for people to find budget-friendly, nutritious foods in today's tough economy. The Affordable Nutrition Index (ANI), unveiled today at the American Dietetic Association's Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo by leading nutrition expert Adam Drewnowski, PhD, professor at the University of Washington, is the first and only tool that assesses food's nutritional profile and cost value to create a nutrition-value-per-dollar score.

The ANI is guided by recommendations in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans and calculates a food score based on nine essential nutrients to encourage (protein, fiber, iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, and vitamins A, C and E) and three nutrients to limit: saturated fat, added sugars and sodium.

Nearly 300 commonly eaten foods including fresh vegetables, fruits, grains from an independent food intake frequency questionnaire, and various convenience foods, including a variety of Campbell's® soups, were assessed in the study. Results showed that dark colored vegetables, certain fruits and vegetable soups were among the most affordable, nutritious foods.

“In today's economy, more people are making food choices based solely on cost, so it's important to guide them on ways to get nutritious options

without hurting their wallets,” said Drewnowski. “It is important to identify a wide range of affordable, nutritious choices that can help people build a balanced diet that fits their lifestyle and budget.”

Vegetables and Vegetable Soups Get Top Scores for Nutrition and Value

In Drewnowski’s analysis, the ANI ranked two dozen soups as comparable to - and in some cases, higher than - many common fruits and vegetables. Drewnowski concluded that based on nutrition and price value, vegetable soups can be a convenient way to help people eat a more healthful, yet affordable, diet consistent with Dietary Guidelines. This new research further validates the importance of including affordable choices across multiple categories of nutritious fresh and prepared foods.

Among the specific findings:

- Carrots, sweet potatoes and broccoli were at the top of the ANI scale; oranges and bananas were the top-scoring fruits in the index.
- Twenty-five Campbell’s soups followed closely on the ANI scale, particularly condensed vegetable soup varieties that are lower in sodium, like Campbell’s® Healthy Request® condensed vegetable soups, which is certified as heart-healthy by the American Heart Association, and Campbell’s® Tomato soup, which recently underwent a 32 percent reduction in sodium and is one of the top-selling soups in the United States.
- Other fresh or cooked vegetables (peas, string beans, squash, lettuce) and fresh fruits (raspberries, blackberries, strawberries,

grapes, nectarines, apples) were also highly ranked.

Drewnowski's research indicates that food, nutrition and price are typically viewed independently by experts. He believes a more inclusive concept of nutrition-per-dollar must be embraced broadly by health experts and the government, as it more accurately reflects the way people actually make [food](#) decisions.

“The obesity epidemic in this country has the potential to get even worse if people are unable to find nutritious choices they can afford and that also fit with their lifestyle,” said Drewnowski. “I’m hoping the Dietary Guidelines set to be released in 2010 will include the importance of affordable nutrition in its recommendations.”

Drewnowski points out that soup has added value and appeal for people because it can easily be found in most supermarkets and local convenience stores, is simple to prepare and highly satisfying. Plus, there are many varieties to choose from, which helps make affordable menu planning enjoyable.

“Ease, familiarity and enjoyment are critical to developing lifelong habits,” said Drewnowski. “If [nutrition](#) and health professionals can get people to include affordable, nutritious and convenient foods as part of a balanced diet, we have moved them a step in the right direction toward healthful eating.”

More information: Fulgoni VL, Keast DR, and Drewnowski A. Development and Validation of the Nutrient-Rich Foods Index: A Tool to Measure Nutritional Quality of Foods. *Journal of Nutrition*, 2009; 139: 1549 - 1554.

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