

4 Point Plan

for helping everyone to eat well during the cost of living crisis

SUMMARY

- Food prices have increased by 5.9% in the last 12 months
- Food insecurity levels have increased by 57% since January
- To help everyone eat well during the cost of living crisis, the Government needs to:
 1. Increase incomes
 2. Provide nutritional safety nets to protect children's health
 3. Make healthy food more affordable
 4. Commit to a new Good Food Bill

The food price squeeze

Food prices have increased by 5.9% in the last 12 months

- Food prices are rising both globally and in the UK in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.
- In the UK prices have risen across all food categories – see Figure 1.

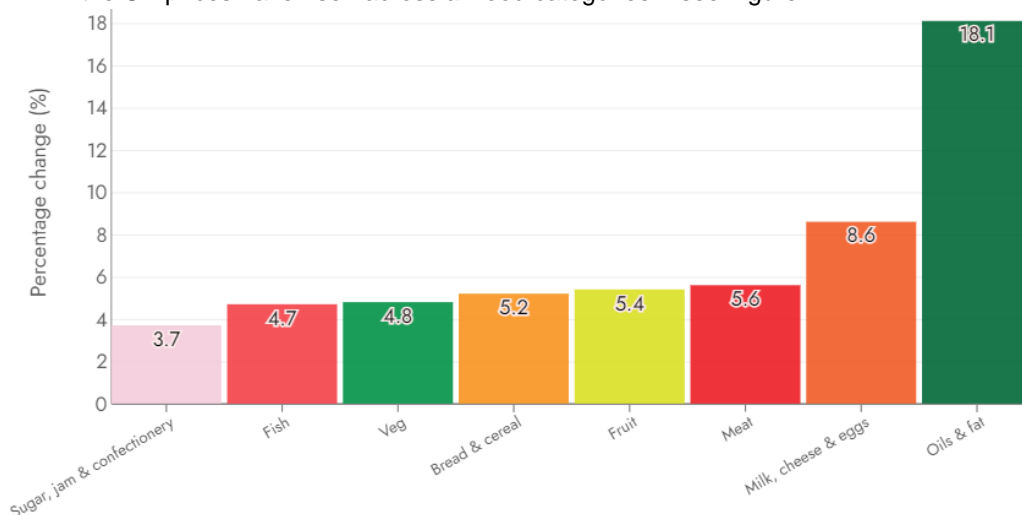


Figure 1: average change in CPI retail food price indices for all food categories, compared to March 2021 (Source: [Food Foundation](#))

Increased prices and reduced incomes are putting more pressure on household budgets

- Energy bills have risen dramatically, as have prices in other areas.
- Changes affecting household incomes, including the removal of the £20 uplift and the increase to National Insurance contributions, are putting further pressure on household budgets.
- The pressure on families is likely to increase further – prices are predicted to continue rising.
- Food is one of the most flexible areas of household spending. It is often the first place where families will seek to make savings when finances are tight.

Families are having to choose less healthy options, or go without

When households need to cut food spending, unhealthier options are the sensible economic choice

- Healthier foods are nearly three times more expensive than less healthy foods calorie for calorie (Source: Food Foundation, [The Broken Plate 2021](#)).
- When food prices rose during and after the 2008 financial crisis, people chose foods that were cheaper per calorie but lower in nutritional quality (Source: [IFS, 2013](#))

Obesity levels are rising, and so are food insecurity levels

- Childhood obesity rates rose to unprecedented levels in 2020/21, with the gap between the most and least deprived widening. Children in the most deprived areas of England are twice as likely to be obese than those in the least deprived areas (Source: NHS Digital, [National Child Measurement Programme, 2020/21](#)).
- 13.8% of households (7.3 million adults) experienced food insecurity in April 2022 – an increase of 57% since January 2022 (Source: The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracker](#)).

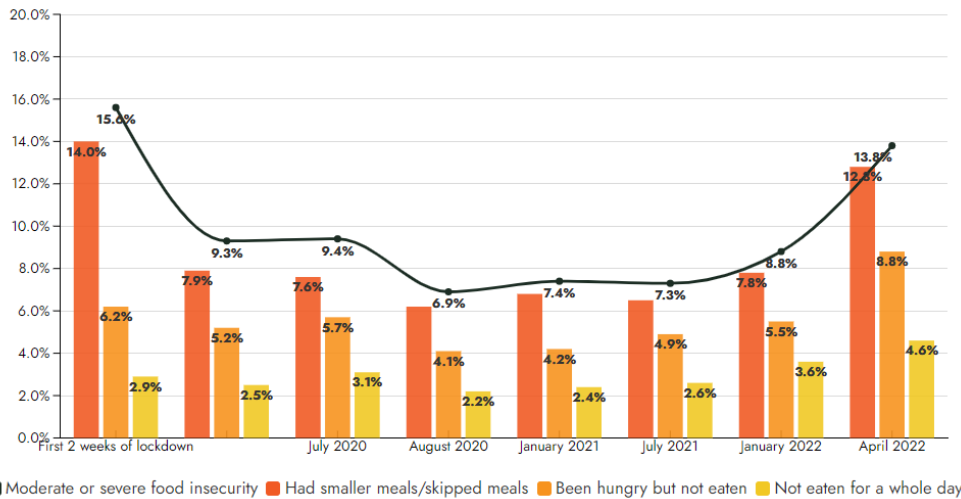


Figure 2: average change in CPI retail food price indices for all food categories, compared to March 2021 (Source: [Food Foundation](#))

Longer-term repercussions

Food insecurity affects physical health, but also mental health and social wellbeing

- In England, children living in deprived communities are shorter than children living in wealthier communities by the time they reach age 11 (Source: Food Foundation, [The Broken Plate 2021](#)).
- Food-insecure children are more likely to suffer with mental health problems, including hyperactivity and inattention, suicidal thoughts, mood disorders and anxiety disorders (Source: [Melchior et al, 2012](#) and [Men, Elgar, and Tarasuk, 2021](#)), and have poorer scores on happiness and life satisfaction, and poorer social skills (Source: [NIHR, 2018](#))

Diet-related ill health and food insecurity put pressure on the NHS

- Health is now the single largest item of government expenditure (Source: [Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2019](#)) and poor diets are one of the leading causes of avoidable harm to our health.

- The NHS spent £6.1bn/year on treating obesity-related ill health in 2014/15, and this is set to rise to £9.7bn/year by 2050 (Source: [Public Health England, 2017](#)).
- Evidence from Canada suggests that annual healthcare costs are 32% higher in households with moderate food insecurity and 76% higher in households with severe food insecurity. It is likely that food insecurity is putting a similar burden on the NHS in the UK (Source: [Tarasuk et al, 2015](#)).

A 4 Point Plan for helping everyone to eat well during the cost of living crisis

- 1. Increase incomes:** As a matter of urgency, the Government should look to raise incomes for the poorest households by increasing working age benefits in line with inflation and ensuring employers are paying at least the real living wage.
- 2. Provide nutritional safety nets to protect children's health:** The current crisis is impacting children's health and life chances. Good nutrition in childhood is essential for improving the long-term health and resilience of the population, reducing childhood obesity, and improving children's academic performance and long-term economic contributions. Free School Meals ensure that low-income children receive at least one hot nutritious meal a day, protecting them from obesity and food insecurity and allowing them to focus on their studies, not where their next meal will come from. 2 in 5 children living below the poverty line don't currently qualify for Free School Meals. Free school breakfasts improve children's attendance, learning and behaviour in the classroom. Current government funding for school breakfasts only provides limited support to ~2,500 of the estimated 7,500+ schools who are eligible for support. The Healthy Start scheme ensures that low-income children have access to nutritious food in the crucial years before they start school but 250,000 children under five living in food insecurity are currently not eligible. All children should be treated fairly and have the same chances to thrive - the Government should expand Free School Meals, school breakfast provision and the Healthy Start scheme so that all children who need them benefit.
- 3. Make healthy foods more affordable:** In its upcoming Health Disparities White Paper the Government should explore how it could use taxes and subsidies to rebalance prices of healthy and unhealthy foods, so that the sensible economic choice for the poorest households are foods that support their health. Stronger fiscal measures, such as the salt and sugar reformulation tax proposed in the [National Food Strategy](#), could raise revenues which could be directed towards nutritional safety net measures such as those outlined above.
- 4. Commit to a new Good Food Bill:** Food insecurity and dietary ill health are issues that are deeply entrenched in the UK. To put us on a better long-term path and to help us cope more effectively with the next food emergency, the Government needs to build the resilience of our food system and our citizens. We must move away from short-term solutions, food banks and emergency food aid, and instead put in place a long-term plan which addresses the underlying causes of the problem. Committing to a Good Food Bill in the upcoming Food Strategy White Paper would allow the Government to set out its vision for the food system, to put in place appropriate long-term targets for reducing dietary ill health and food insecurity, and to establish mechanisms for assessing progress. Read our full MP briefing on the case for a new Food Bill [here](#).

For further information please contact Isabel Hughes – Policy Engagement Manager, The Food Foundation (Isabel.Hughes@foodfoundation.org.uk)

For regularly updated data follow The Food Foundation's [food prices tracker](#) and [food insecurity tracker](#).

About The Food Foundation:

We are a young, dynamic, and impactful charity with a mission to change food policy and business practice to ensure everyone, across the UK, can afford and access a healthy diet, supplied by a sustainable food system. We are independent of all political parties and business. We work with others who believe there is a problem with the system and want to change it.