
GUIDE TO
Food Costing
IN BC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PHSA and the regional health authorities coordinate and support the food costing in BC.
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INTRODUCING FOOD COSTING IN BC

Thank you for agreeing to do food costing. This “Guide to Food Costing in BC” is a companion tool to the online training video. This guide contains the details for food costing data collection. The quality of the data you collect is very important to the outcome of the project. Please watch the training video and refer to this guide to make sure the data you collect is accurate and complete.

BEFORE YOU GO TO THE STORE

Review the data collection tool to familiarize yourself with the food items you will be pricing. If you don’t recognize an item, ask for help. It is helpful to read the permission letter so you are prepared to inform the store about the food costing process.

Your health authority contact will give you the names and addresses of stores where you will be food costing. For each store you need:

- › A paper or electronic copy of the data collection tool. Complete the cover sheet with your name, contact information, the store name, address, and the postal code.
- › A sharp pencil and an eraser – it is extremely important to print clearly.
- › A calculator or cell phone. A clipboard is useful too.
- › The consent form and/or permission letter.
- › Your “Guide to Food Costing in BC” booklet.

Schedule up to 2 hours per store; you may need less time after you price one or two stores.

Questions?

Contact Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC by calling 8-1-1 from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. Ask the operator to speak directly to Dietitian Services. You do not need to provide your care card information if asked.

ARRIVING AT THE STORE

When you enter the store go to customer service, introduce yourself and explain you will be conducting food costing.

Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), the coordinator of this project, and the health authorities secure permission for you to do food costing; however, the personnel at customer service may not be aware of this and may ask you to speak to the store manager.

Please bring the consent form and/or permission letter for the store or chain and share it with customer service. If you are asked questions you cannot answer, call Dietitian Services or your health authority contact.

If you are told it is not ok to collect prices, thank the personnel and leave. Complete the information at the top of the cover sheet and make a note about why costing did not occur. Get in touch with your health authority contact to find out if there is another store in which to collect food costs instead.

HOW TO DO FOOD COSTING

Record the lowest price for the **food item** written in bold and highlighted in grey.

Food Costing Data Collection Tool

Food item	Item #	Purchase Unit		Price	On Sale ✓
		Measure	Size		
Milk & Milk Alternatives & Refrigerated Foods					
Milk, 2%, fresh	1.0	L	4		
	1.1				
Cheese, processed food, cheddar, slices	2.0	gram	500		
	2.1	gram	250		
	2.2	kg	1		
	2.3				
Cheese, mozzarella, part...	3.0	gram	200		

Each food item has a “purchase unit”. It includes:

- › The “measure”, that is the *unit* of measure such as grams, kilograms, litres, or pounds.
- › The “size”, that is the *number* of grams, kilograms, litres, or pounds.

Read the shelf price or sticker price carefully to make sure it matches the product you are costing. Write the price **clearly** beside the size of the product.

When recording the price, you do not need to use dollar and cents symbols - **just be sure to mark the decimal clearly in the right place**, for example 0.98 not 98 to represent 98 cents.

Important point

Always price the specific food item in the preferred purchase unit if it is available, even if a different size is cheaper per unit or if a different size is on sale and is cheaper.

IF THE PREFERRED PRODUCT SIZE IS NOT AVAILABLE

If you cannot find the food item in any of the suggested sizes, price the specific food item in a size that is available. **Record the measure, the size, and the price in the blank space.**

Cheese, mozzarella, partly skim, block, not slices	2.3			
	3.0	gram	200	
	3.1	gram	500	
	3.2	kg	1	
	3.3			
Cheese, cheddar, block, not slices, medium	4.0	gram	200	
	4.1	gram	225	
	4.2	gram	400	
	4.3	gram	454	
	4.4	GRAM	500	3.69
	4.5	gram	200	
	4.6	gram	225	
(If medium cheddar is not available, price the cheapest alternative cheddar cheese)	4.7	gram	400	
	4.8	gram	454	
	4.9			
	5.0	gram	750	
Yogurt, fruit stirred 1% to 2% M.F.				

If the food item is not available in any of the suggested sizes, note this with "N/A" so we know the item was not missed.

Cheese, mozzarella, partly skim, block, not slices	2.3			
	3.0	gram	200	
	3.1	gram	500	
	3.2	kg	1	
	3.3			
Cheese, cheddar, block, not slices, medium	4.0	gram	200	N/A
	4.1	gram	225	
	4.2	gram	400	
	4.3	gram	454	
	4.4			
	4.5	gram	200	
	4.6	gram	225	
(If medium cheddar is not available, price the cheapest alternative cheddar cheese)	4.7	gram	400	
	4.8	gram	454	
	4.9			
	5.0	gram	750	
Yogurt, fruit stirred 1% to 2% M.F.				

IF THE PREFERRED PRODUCT IS NOT AVAILABLE IN ANY SIZE

For many foods there is a suggested *alternative food* to price. For example, if there is no **medium** cheddar cheese in the store you are instructed to price the cheapest alternative cheddar.

	4.2	gram	400		
	4.3	gram	454		
	4.4				
(If <i>medium</i> cheddar is not available, price the cheapest alternative cheddar cheese)	4.5	gram	200		
	4.6	gram	225		
	4.7	gram	400		
	4.8	gram	454		
	4.9				
Yogurt, fruit stirred 1% to 2% M.F. (Do not price organic. If 750 gram <i>organic</i> is all that is available price 650 gram)	5.0	gram	750		
	5.1	gram	650		
	5.2	gram	500		
	5.3				

IF THE PRODUCT IS ON SALE

If the product you are pricing is on sale or on special, put a checkmark in the “on sale” column. If there is a coupon for the product that can be redeemed at the check-out, use the coupon price and put a checkmark in the “on sale” column. Use the *regular* price if the sale price or coupon:

- › Requires purchasing multiple units, a minimum grocery order, or a mail-in rebate.
- › Requires buying a club membership, for example a Co-op store.
- › Is a significant reduction on the item for quick sale that day only, for example 50% off.

Check the price sticker closely.



Bran cereal advertised “2 boxes for \$5.00”. Use the \$2.50 sale price. If it is 2 boxes for \$5.00 or \$2.69 each, use \$2.69. This may be a sale price or it may be the regular price – if it is the sale price then check the “on sale” column. Remember to read sticker and shelf prices carefully.

MEAT & POULTRY

Always price fresh meat and poultry, unless only frozen is available. Please price packages that weigh less than 3 kilograms.

Sometimes meat and poultry are priced “per package”. If chicken legs are on sale for \$14.99 per package, the weight of each package will be similar **but not the same** and you will need to calculate the average weight. Follow these steps:

- › Add the weights of three packages together and divide by three to calculate an average weight.
- › Record the average weight and the price in the blank space beside item 7.2 on the data collection sheet. Enter kg or lb (the measure), the average weight (the size), and the price. For example: if the average weight of the 3 packages is 990 grams enter “gram” “990” and 14.99.

Price packaged ham. If you cannot find packaged sliced ham but there is sliced ham in the deli section of the store, enter the price per 100 grams beside item 8.3.

Frozen foods:

Price fish fillets, frozen, *block*. Frozen block fish is not common. If you do not see block fish then price frozen fillets. If there is no frozen white fish, price fresh fish.

PRODUCE

For fresh produce record the “loose” or “open binned” price per kilogram or per pound. For carrots, apples, oranges, and onions price all the items that are written in bold and highlighted, both “loose” and “pre-bagged”.

Some items such as lettuce, cucumbers, and celery are often priced per item or “each” but you are asked to record a price per weight. If a product is priced per item you will need to weigh the item and do some simple calculations. Using lettuce as an example, follow these steps:

- › Weigh three different heads of lettuce and record the weights in the space provided on the tool.
- › Add the weights together and divide by three to determine the average weight.
- › Make a note of the price per head of lettuce.
- › Beside item 25.2 enter gram, kg or lb under “measure”, the average weight under “size” and the price per head under “price”.

If the lettuce is priced per “two heads” you need to weigh six heads of lettuce to determine the average weight of two. Record the weight of two heads in each of the spaces provided. Add the three weights together and divide by three to determine the average weight. Record the measure, average weight, and price.

If you do not want to do the calculations in the store record the three weights and the price per head and do the calculations later.

If you cannot find a scale in the store ask customer service for assistance. If you need to go somewhere else in the store to weigh items try to take all the items that need to be weighed with you to save time. If you cannot get a weight, **record the price and note that the price is per item and not by weight.**

Potatoes

Record the price for the cheapest 4.54 kg or 10 lb bag. Commonly these will be russets, white skinned, red skinned, or Yukon gold. If that size bag is not available price the closest size. If there are no pre-bagged potatoes in the store price loose.

Tomatoes

Consider “on the vine” as “loose” – they are often more expensive but may be the cheapest if on sale or they may be the only tomatoes available. Only price packaged tomatoes if there are no loose tomatoes in the store. Record the weight of the package and the price.

Mushrooms

Price loose mushrooms. If they are not available price packaged. Record the weight and the price of one package.

BREAD & BAKERY

- › Price one loaf of bread. Do not record the price of packages that contain more than one loaf.
- › If you are not sure if the bread is 100% whole wheat check the ingredient list – the first ingredient should be whole wheat flour.
- › For hamburger buns or rolls record both the **weight** and the price of a package.

CANNED/PACKAGED FOODS/DRY GOODS

Price **packaged** dry goods, for example cereal, rice, and pasta. If the item is not available in a package, price it in the bulk foods section.

“Cereal, toasted oats O’s”

Cheerios® is an example of this cereal - record the lowest price for this **type** of cereal, not necessarily the brand Cheerios®.

Peanuts

Peanuts are shelled, meaning the shell is removed.

Parboiled or converted rice

Parboiled or converted rice is not widely available. If you cannot find parboiled or converted rice, price white long-grain rice.

Salad dressing, mayonnaise type

Miracle Whip® is an example of this type of salad dressing - record the lowest price for this **type** of salad dressing, not necessarily the brand Miracle Whip®.

BEFORE LEAVING THE STORE

Please check your work to make sure you have written clearly and you have not missed any food items. If an item is not available indicate this with “N/A” so we know it was not forgotten. Fill in the cover sheet information and then submit your completed data collection tool to your health authority contact.

Still have questions?

If you have any questions contact Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC by calling 8-1-1 from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. Ask the operator to speak directly to Dietitian Services. You do not need to provide your care card information if asked. After 5pm, you can send an e-mail at www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating/emaildietitian.html

Thank you for participating in this year’s food costing. This important work could not be done without you.

WHY DO FOOD COSTING?

Provinces and territories across Canada collect food prices to better understand how much it costs to eat a basic nutritious diet. This information is presented in a report and shared.

PHSA coordinates food costing and works in partnership with all the health authorities, the Ministry of Health, and Dietitians of Canada to collect, analyze, and share the food costing data. Volunteers support the work by collecting the data in grocery stores around the province.

If you want to learn more about PHSA’s food security work go to www.phsa.ca/populationhealth and click on “Food Security”.

If you want to learn more about food costing in BC go to the Dietitians of Canada website at www.dietitians.ca and click on “Dietitians’ Views” and then “Individual and Household Food Insecurity”.