



16.

What Our Money Buys

IT IS CUSTOMARY to complain about the high cost of food because we spend so much of our income for it. Actually we buy more and better food and yet spend a smaller part of our income for food than do people in any other place in the world. Wages for an hour's work here in the United States buys more food than in other countries.

Buying the food we need is investing in good nutrition, and this investment pays us continuous and generous dividends in health, well-being, satisfaction, and

happiness. Of course, the amount of money we spend for food depends on how much we earn, how many persons we have to feed, and the kinds of foods we buy. The smaller our salary, the greater is the proportion of it that must go for food; and of course, the more people we have to feed, the larger our food bill. Also, we can make expensive or inexpensive choices of the foods in our Daily Food Guide and of the foods we add to the Guide.

A small amount of money spent wisely can buy better nutrition than a large amount spent carelessly. But the less money there is to spend, the more carefully we must plan, buy, and prepare food in order to have everything we need for good nutrition.

VALUES

How dull life would be if we bought food only for its nutritive value! Money spent for food buys other values too, which are not measured in terms of food energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins.



One value is the satisfaction we get from buying what we prefer—steak instead of stew meat, fresh milk instead of canned, strawberries out of season, and lots of other preferences. Fresh milk has the same nutritive value as canned evaporated milk but it costs more. The additional cost does not buy extra nutritive value but pays for the work of handling such a perishable product and keeping it available so we can buy it whenever we choose.

Another value is the security which comes with having well-stocked cupboards and refrigerators, buying

ahead of our needs, and knowing we can have food whenever we want it.

Some of us buy prestige when we spend money for food. There is a prestige value to buying unusual foods, a great variety of foods, and in using these to entertain frequently and elaborately. A certain snob appeal goes with buying imported foods, having a charge account at a specialty food shop, or ordering groceries by telephone and having them delivered. The cost of these extras has nothing to do with the cost of nutritive value, but the extras are fun if we can afford them in addition to buying the foods we need for good health. We may buy social or business prestige by eating at the right places and by entertaining the right guests at the right places. It may be important to business men and women to eat lunch where other business people eat, even though they could have a better meal for less money elsewhere.

CONVENIENCE

Savings in the time and labor required to prepare foods are still other values we can buy when we spend money for food. We often call this "built-in maid service." The service may be as simple as having the tops removed from carrots or having bread cut into slices. It may be as complicated as having ready-to-heat-and-serve a complete dinner of meat, potato, and two vegetables. We can buy hundreds of items that are partially prepared and ready for us to complete or that are completely ready to serve.

We must not confuse the cost of saving time and labor with the cost of the nutritive value of our food.

When we complain that nutritious meals cost too much, we may be spending too much of our food money for *service*, and not having enough left to buy the nutritional values we need.

In using convenience foods such as meat pies or other mixtures that serve as main dishes for a meal, we should check to see if we are getting a full serving of meat or fish or whatever the main food ingredient is. Standards for the quantity of ingredients have not yet been set up for most of the commercial ready-to-serve main dishes. Convenience foods often contain more fat and carbohydrate in proportion to protein than similar items made at home. Sometimes you may think, "I couldn't make this dish any cheaper in my own kitchen." Perhaps not, but what you would make for about the same cost, or even for less cost, is likely to contain more food value and often more flavor.

How much we can afford to spend to save ourselves time and labor depends on our income and the money value of our time as well as how we prefer to spend our money for the food we need and want.

WHAT SHALL IT BE?

The problem we all face is deciding which values, in addition to the nutritive ones, we can and want to afford. Few of us can afford all of the extra values all of the time, so we choose different ones to buy at different times.

Sometimes we choose to buy built-in maid service and purchase ready-to-serve items. Another time we choose to buy food and recreation to celebrate a special occasion by eating away from home. The more money

we decide to spend for the occasion, the more service, silverware, variety, and atmosphere we can buy. If we spend enough, we can buy exotic foods, entertainment, and swank galore. Other times we choose to buy a favorite food even though it is out of season or has to be brought a great distance and therefore is expensive. Whatever our choices may be, paying for them is more interesting if we recognize the different kinds of values that our money is buying.

Food is only one of the many things which our income must buy. Money for food must compete with money for housing, for clothes, for recreation, and many other things until we hardly give food a fair share of the income. We can obligate ourselves too heavily for the continuous fixed expenses such as rent, insurance, and numerous installment payments. It is not uncommon to try to save enough from the food budget to buy a new pair of shoes or a lamp, make a payment on the television set, or to buy some other item entirely unrelated to our nutrition and health. Then the food budget has to take what is left, and often this is not enough to feed us well.

Sometimes we are doing so much planning and buying for the future that we forget to provide well for today. Planning and preparing for both the near-at-hand and the far-ahead future must include day-to-day food for fitness. Good health adds meaning and pleasure to everything we do at every age. What we eat today becomes what we *are* tomorrow.



