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**Save cash by switching to healthy food**

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HAVING a healthy **diet** can cost people less than eating **junk food,** according to new research.

It says parents of obese children can save up to £6.58 a week by changing shopping habits.

The study challenges the main reasons many families give for eating the wrong **food** - that healthier options cost more.

A research team led by University of **Bristol** doctors Julian Hamilton-Shield and Debbie Sharp, analysed **food** diaries kept by the families of obese children.

They measured the cost of substituting healthy for unhealthy **food** and found it can cost less.

Figures revealed healthier eating can cost up to £2.31 extra a week but savings of £6.58 a week can be made by switching shops.

Reduced They clearly show it is possible to switch to a healthy **diet** and still reduce costs, says the research published in the Obesity issue of the British Journal of General Practice.

Professor Julian Hamilton-Shield, of **Bristol** Royal Hospital for Children, who is an expert in child diabetes, obesity and metabolism, said: "**Food** cost is frequently cited as a reason for failure to address eating behaviours in clinical practice.

"This study demonstrates that for many this is a perceived rather than a real barrier."

The **food** diaries of obese children were analysed for various aspects of nutritional content then converted by qualified dieticians into "healthier option" daily menus.

The diaries showed that on average they consumed 221 calories per day more than the estimated average requirements.

The adjusted healthier menus reduced this to just seven calories above.

Researchers compared the cost of the two menus if bought from budget supermarkets, mid-range supermarkets and local shops.

They concluded that shoppers at a mid-range supermarket eating a **diet** of low nutritional quality could switch to a healthy **diet** by shopping at a budget supermarket and still save money.

Other factors play a part in **diet**, such as taste preferences and the time people are able to spend cooking.

But the results suggest that as pressure grows on family finances, there are healthy eating options that will not break the bank.

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