

The Price of Eating Well in Durham Region

2019

According to Durham Region Health Department data, some families in Durham Region cannot afford a healthy diet.

Let's take a closer look to see why...

Rising Costs

Over time, costs for housing, general expenses and food have risen. As these expenses increase, the ability to purchase healthy foods becomes a real challenge for many families.

What is the Nutritious Food Basket?

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB)¹ is a tool used by Durham Region Health Department each year to provide a measure of the average cost of a basic healthy diet for a family of 4.

The Nutritious Food Basket assumes that:

- most people have the time, food skills and equipment to be able to prepare most meals from scratch
- people have access to grocery stores

Understanding the Nutritious Food Basket

The tool only includes the cost of healthy food items. Processed foods and food

with little or no nutritional value (such as coffee, soft drinks and potato chips) are not included. The NFB does not take into consideration any foods for special diets, such as gluten-free products, or personal and household care items like toothpaste, soap and cleaning supplies, all of which would result in additional costs.

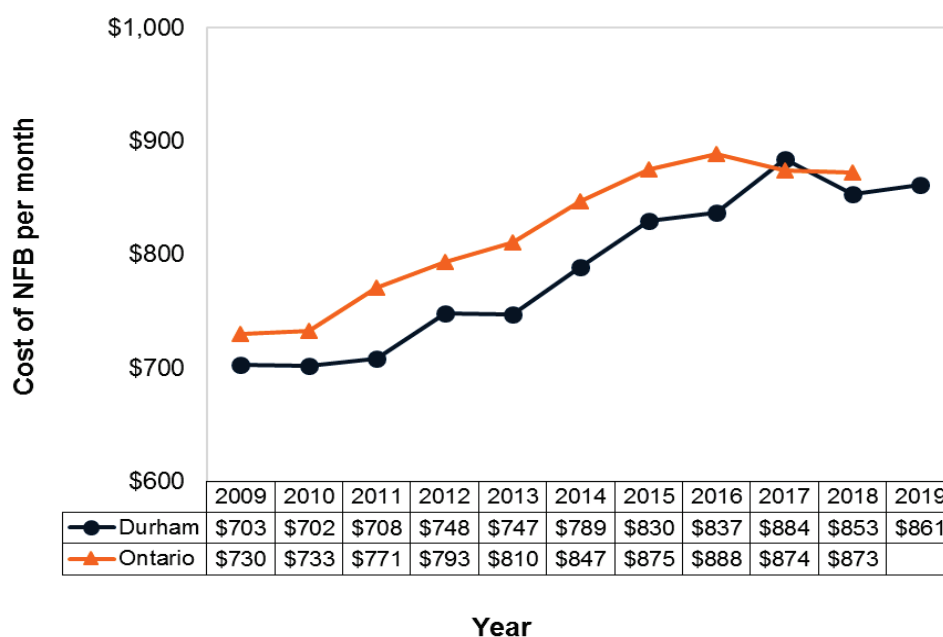
The health department found that in June 2019, the NFB for a family of four in Durham Region was **\$199** per week. This is a **22 percent** increase from May 2009 (see Figure 1). As food prices continue to rise, the risk of food insecurity also increases.



Food Insecurity

means not being able to afford safe, nutritious food
due to lack of money

Figure 1: Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) for a Family of 4, Durham Region and Ontario, 2009 - 2019



*Data for Ontario is not available until Dec 2019. Based on the Canadian Community Health Survey, 2017

Household Food Insecurity in Durham Region

For many families in Durham Region, the inability to purchase and/or access nutritious food is a reality. Household food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. Food insecurity is a serious local issue, with 14% of Durham Region households being food insecure.² (see Figure 2). This represents approximately 66,100 Durham Region residents. For these families, being food insecure means:

- worrying that food will run out
- having to compromise on the quality and/or quantity of food they eat
- having to reduce their food intake or skip meals

Food Insecurity: Who is most affected?

- People living on social assistance find that after paying for rent and utilities, there is not enough money to buy healthy food.
- 17% of food insecure households in Ontario are lone-parents with child under 25.²
- People on fixed incomes - such as those receiving Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program or working full time at minimum wage - have difficulty buying foods that make up a healthy diet (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Household Food Insecurity, Durham Region, 2017, CCHS

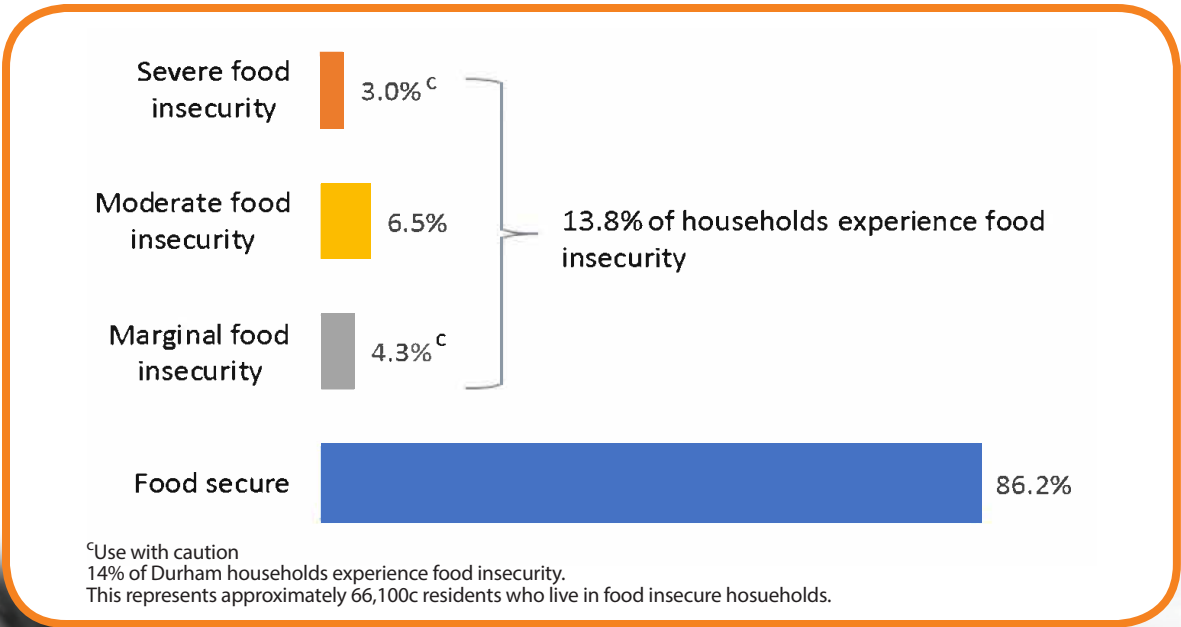
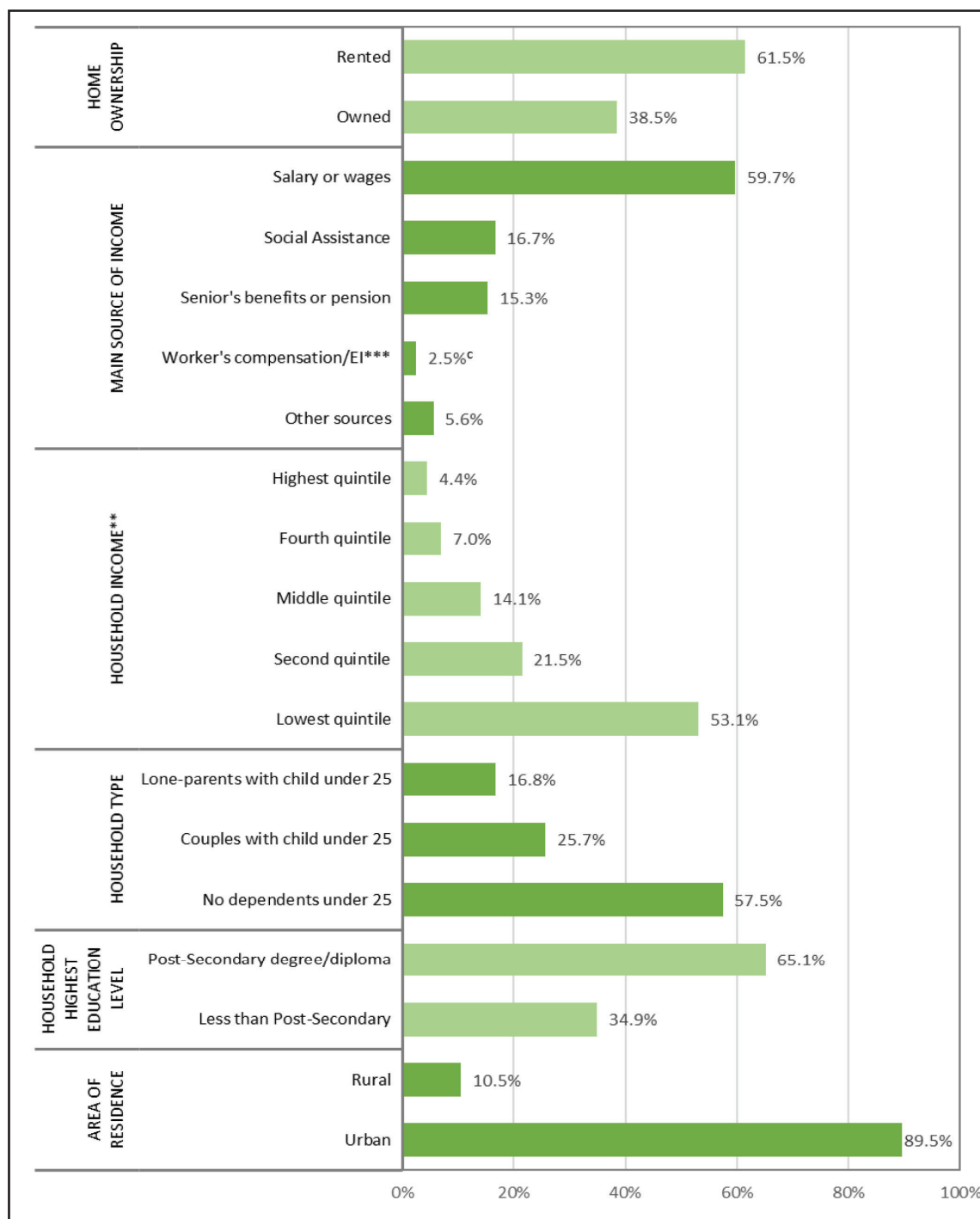


Figure 3: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Households Experiencing Food Insecurity in Ontario, 2017 CCHS*



^c Results need to be interpreted with caution as coefficient of variation (CV) is between 15.1% and 35.0%, inclusive. The CV is a measure of variability. Higher CV usually indicates that the estimates are less precise and reliable. An estimate with a CV over 35.0% is not releasable.

*Canadian Community Health Survey

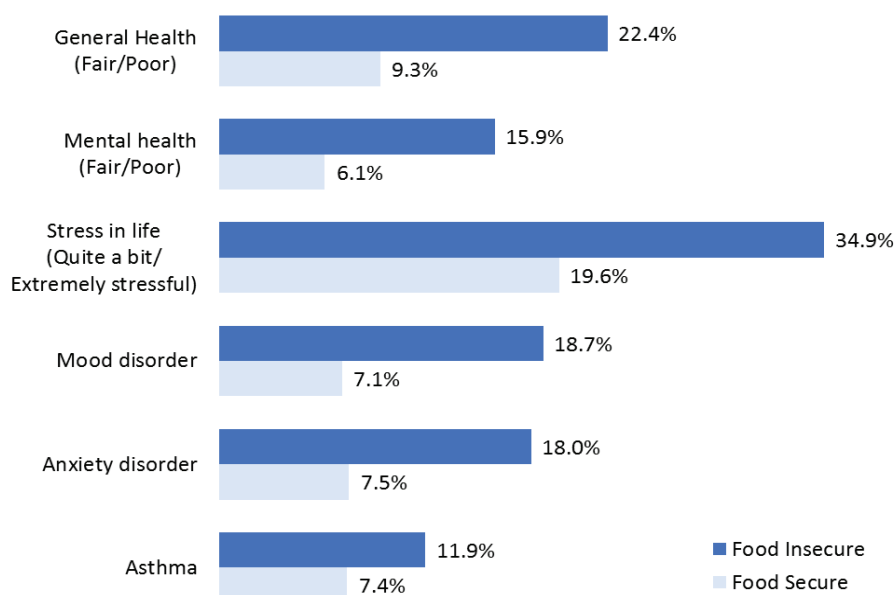
**Households were grouped into five categories (quintiles) based on a ratio of their total household income compared to the low-income cut-off for their household and community size. It is a measure that compares a household's income to the income of other households in the same province.

***EI: Employment Insurance

Key risk factors in household food insecurity are:²

- Low income
- Budget shocks - e.g. job loss, unexpected medical expenses, increased housing costs
- Geographic isolation
- Health conditions requiring a special diet
- Lack of transportation

Figure 4: Self-reported Health Outcomes by Household Food Insecurity Status, Ontario, 2017 CCHS²



In general, people living in food insecure households are more likely to experience conditions of poor mental health, more stress in life, anxiety disorders, asthma.





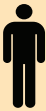




Table 1: What’s Left After Shelter and Food Costs?

2019 Durham Region Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios

Scenario References¹⁵

Monthly Calculations

	Family of Four Ontario Works  Scenario 1	Family of Four Full-Time Minimum Wage Earners ^m  Scenario 2	Family of Four Median ONTARIO Income (after tax) ⁿ  Scenario 3	Single Parent Household with Children, Ontario Works  Scenario 4	One Person Household, Ontario Works  Scenario 5	One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program  Scenario 6	One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement  Scenario 7
Income							
Income from Employment		\$ 2427.00	\$ 8075.00				
Basic Allowance ^b	\$ 494.00			\$ 360.00	\$ 343.00	\$ 672.00	
Maximum Shelter Allowance ^b	\$ 756.00			\$ 697.00	\$ 390.00	\$ 497.00	
Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement ^c							\$ 1500.00
Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System ^d							\$ 83.00
Canada Child Tax Benefit ^e	\$ 1147.00	\$ 1108.00	\$ 395.00	\$ 1147.00			
GST/HST credit ^f	\$ 72.00	\$ 72.00		\$72.00	\$24.00	\$ 32.00	\$ 36.00
Ontario Trillium Benefit ^g	\$154.00	\$ 154.00		\$125.00	\$68.00	\$ 71.00	\$ 108.00
Working Income Tax Benefit ^h		\$ 20.00					
Employment Insurance paid ⁱ		\$ (39.00)	\$ (124.00)				
Canada Pension Plan paid ^j		\$ (109.00)	\$ (363.00)				
Total Income	\$ 2623.00	\$ 3603.00	\$ 7983.00	\$ 2401.00	\$ 825.00	\$ 1272.00	\$ 1727.00
Selected Expenses							
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro) ^k	(3 Bdr.) \$ 1380.00	(3 Bdr.) \$ 1380.00	(3 Bdr.) \$ 1380.00	(2 Bdr.) \$ 1242.00	(Bachelor) \$ 843.00	(1 Bdr.) \$ 1153.00	(1 Bdr.) \$ 1153.00
Food ^l	\$ 861.00	\$ 861.00	\$ 861.00	\$ 620.00	\$ 241.00	\$ 241.00	\$ 175.00
Total Selected Expenses	\$ 2241.00	\$ 2241.00	\$ 2241.00	\$ 1862.00	\$ 1084.00	\$ 1394.00	\$ 1328.00
Funds Remaining (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$ 382.00	\$ 1392.00	\$ 5742.00	\$ 539.00	\$ (259.00)	\$ (122.00)	\$ 399.00
Percentage of income required for rent	53%	38%	17%	52%	102%	91%	67%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	33%	24%	11%	26%	29%	19%	10%

NOTE: Shelter costs may or may not include utilities; all dollars rounded to nearest whole number.

Food insecurity and Health...

Did You Know?

The inability to purchase nutritious foods, and the emotional and psychological stress that comes from that, can lead to many serious health problems. At any age, not eating enough nutritious food can put people at greater risk for chronic disease, infection and lowered immunity.

Specifically:

- During pregnancy, poor birth outcomes such as neural tube defects, low birth weight and anemia are often related to maternal health and nutrition.^{5,6,7,8,9}
- Food insecurity contributes to the early cessation of exclusive breastfeeding in Canada.⁴
- During infancy, poor nutrition may slow growth and cognitive development.¹⁰
- Children and youth who experience hunger are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions including asthma and depression and find it harder to concentrate and learn in school.¹¹
- Food insecurity can lead to negative psychosocial outcomes in children, while teenagers are at risk of suffering from depression, social anxiety and suicide.¹²
- Adults living in food insecure households have poorer physical and mental health, as well as higher rates of many chronic conditions, including:¹³
 - Depression
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Hypertension

- Among seniors, malnutrition can result in a loss of muscle mass and strength, which can lead to disability and loss of independence.

For those who are food insecure, managing these health implications is extremely challenging. As stated, food insecurity is linked to household income. When income is low, people do not have enough money for rent, bills *and* food. Any illness or health challenge that results in additional medical costs and/or impacts an individual's ability to work, places further strain on individual or family finances and their ability to purchase healthy food making it more difficult to manage self-care further compromising health. The cycle between food insecurity and poor health is a difficult one to break, resulting in significant costs to the health care system and society.

In Ontario in 2008, chronic diseases related to poverty and food insecurity alone carried a health care cost of ~ \$2.9 billion¹⁴ - much more than would be needed to prevent them by improving ongoing access to a healthy diet.

When Money is Tight, How do People Cope?

- People cut back on their food budget to pay for shelter and other costs of living.
- People are forced to skip meals or fill up on cheap food that is not always nutritious.
- They may eat less fruit, vegetables, whole grains and milk products as these are often more costly.
- Parents living on low incomes feed their children first. They will go without eating to ensure that their children can eat. As a result, the parents' nutrition and health suffers.

- As a last resort, people are forced to use food banks that generally offer approximately three days' worth of food. Food banks were never meant to be a long-term solution to food insecurity.

How Much Does it Cost Each Month to Eat Healthy?

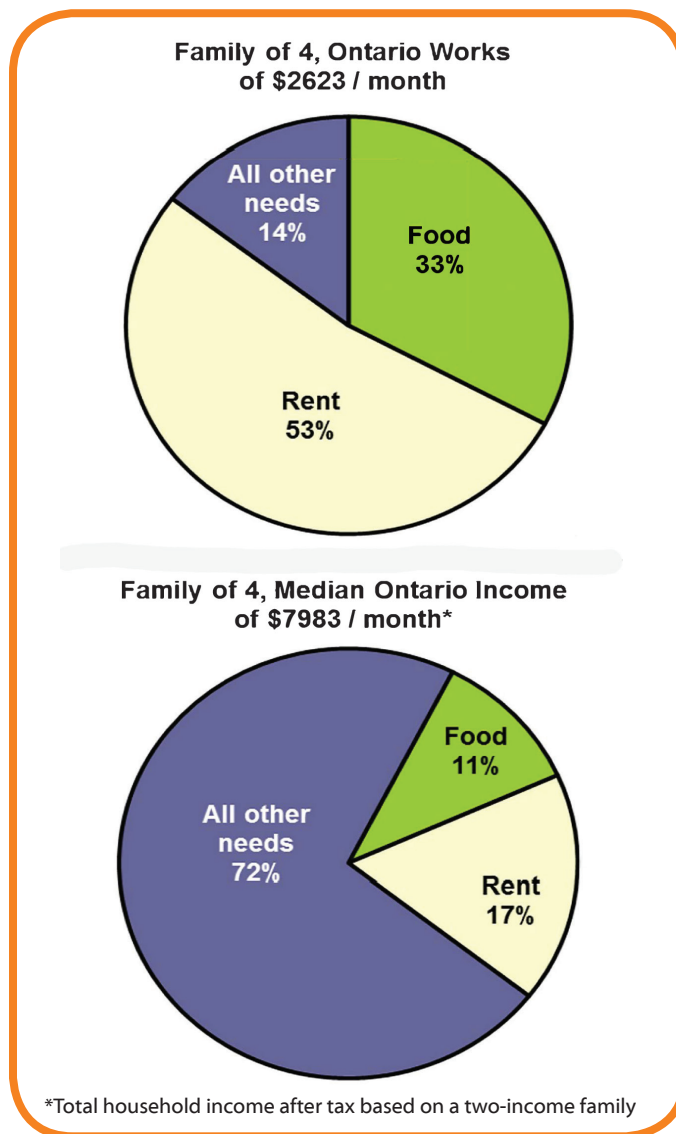
According to data collected from the Durham Nutritious Food Basket in June 2019, the cost of feeding a family of four in Durham Region was **\$861** per month.

- For a family of 4 with an Ontario median income of \$7,983/month, the monthly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket (\$861) represents **11%** of this family's income.
- In contrast, for a family of 4 on the Ontario Works monthly income of \$2,623/month, the monthly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket represents **33%** of their income (Figure 5).

How do we Know Some People Don't Have Enough Money for Food?

A summary of some real-life situations for people living in Durham Region appears in Table 1. These scenarios show that after paying for shelter and food, minimum wage and part-time earners and households on fixed incomes have little, if any, money left over to cover other basic monthly expenses such as transportation, telephone, personal care items, household products and clothing. The amount of household spending on food and shelter is roughly **4 times greater** for those at the lowest income level than for those at the highest.

Figure 5: Percent of Income Used for Housing, Food and All Other Needs, Durham Region, 2019



After Paying Rent and Utility Bills, What Would You do if There Wasn't Enough Money Left to Buy Nutritious Food?

For many families in Durham Region this is the reality. When faced with the choice of paying the rent or going hungry, many families are forced to go hungry. The impact of which has serious consequences for health.

What can you do to help?

With your Client

- Support clients in accessing training e.g. education bursaries, training subsidies.
- Support clients in searching for jobs.
- Share helpful resources found on “**Living with Low Income**” website with your clients bit.ly/2WUBzpw
- For information about supports and resources available to promote healthy eating during pregnancy, breastfeeding and making an informed decision about infant feeding refer them to Durham Health Connection Line 1-800-841-2729 or durham.ca

What can you do to help?

Within your Agency / Organization

- Increase awareness among staff of the issues - inform staff of the reality of food insecurity in Durham Region. Share **The Price of Eating Well in Durham Region newsletter** with your staff.
- Post the **Food Poverty in Durham** infographic poster at your agency.
- Encourage clients living with low income to file their annual income tax
- Recognize voluntarism among your staff (i.e. encourage staff to participate in community support programs such as a school breakfast club in your neighbourhood and recognize their efforts).
- Host **Discover Your Inner Chef!** workshops at your organization for your clients
- Build advocacy opportunities for your clients into your current food programs.
- Learn more about infant feeding practices among mothers living in Durham Region. Visit durham.ca and search “Infant Feeding Surveillance”.
- Support a breastfeeding friendly environment in your workplace (for clients and staff); welcome breastfeeding anytime, anywhere. Call **Durham Health Connection Line** 1-800-841-2729 to request resources that support and promote breastfeeding.

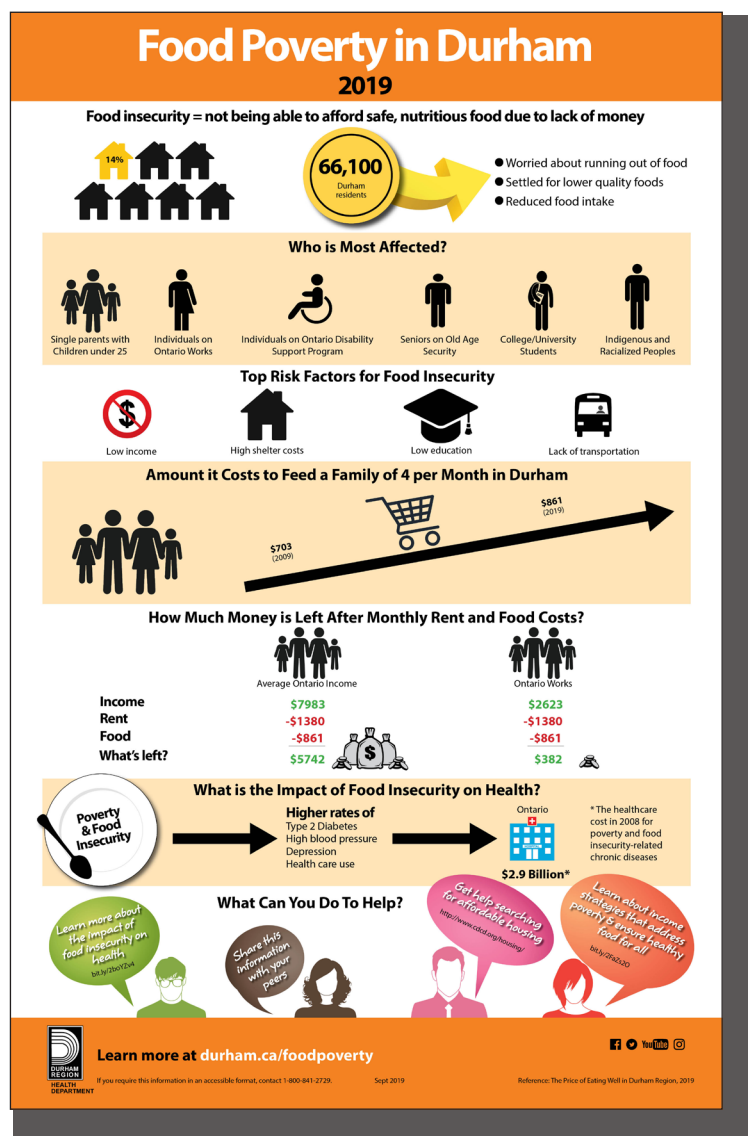
What can you do to help?

Within your Community

- Learn about strategies that address poverty and ensure healthy food for all bit.ly/2FaZs2O
- Volunteer at a local tax clinic bit.ly/2xBMXNt
- Advocate for a national food security program that ensures equal access to safe and nutritious food for all Canadians.
- Participate in coalitions that address:
 - Poverty
 - Affordable housing
 - Affordable child care
 - Food insecurity



References available online at durham.ca/foodpoverty



Breastfeeding questions or concerns?

We can help!

Durham Health Connection Line

Public Health Nurses provide confidential telephone advice, written information, and access to other breastfeeding services in the community.

One to One Breastfeeding Support

In-home visits and/or clinic services are available for individual breastfeeding help by Public Health Nurses.

Breastfeeding Groups

These drop-in groups are facilitated by Public Health Nurses. They provide an opportunity to share ideas, meet other parents, and support one another. Family members and support persons are welcome.

Breastfeeding Information

Our website has detailed information on breastfeeding and breastfeeding resources. Please visit: durham.ca/health



Durham Health Connection Line
905-666-6241 or 1-800-841-2729
durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 905-666-6241 or 1-800-841-2729.



FOOD IN DURHAM



A list of places to find food in Durham Region



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Sept 2019

Durham Health Connection Line
1-800-841-2729 or 905-666-6241

durham.ca



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