

Costs push moms into unhealthy food options

By [Dave Chambers](#)

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The food industry and the government must implement "drastic measures" to curb the rising cost of healthy food, say local nutritionists.



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The country's first nutrition survey of mothers of primary schoolchildren found cost was the main factor influencing what they fed their children, regardless of their income.

Study leader Yolande Smit, from Stellenbosch University medical school's nutrition division, said: "The effect of food cost on food choices and healthy eating cannot be overestimated. Less healthy, energy-dense food is more affordable, making it a more desirable purchasing option, especially among lower socioeconomic groups."

Smit and University of KwaZulu-Natal nutritionist Suna Kassier analysed questionnaires from 476 mothers from Cape Town's northern suburbs and conducted focus groups with 37 of them.

Reporting their findings in the SA Journal of Child Health, they said the school tuck shop was another barrier to healthy food choices. "Almost all of the mothers agreed that tuck shops and informal vendors sell predominantly unhealthy food," they said.

Supermarkets could do more by displaying healthy food more prominently, they said, and food advertising was a big factor influencing unhealthy choices. Mothers said time constraints meant they bought convenience food more often.

Said Smit: "Not only is there a need for healthier convenience meals, but also education on ways to prepare quick and easy nutritious homemade meals.

"The food industry has responded and capitalised on this need, but the majority of options still focus on convenience and not on health."

Source: The Times

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