



Join Me in the “Do the Math Challenge”

Purpose

I am supporting the campaign called Put Food in the Budget, for a \$100 per month increase for people receiving social assistance. I would like you to join me.

The new phase of this campaign, called the “Do the Math Challenge”, is aimed at demonstrating to the three party leaders and to your local MPP that there is public support for the Put Food in the Budget demands of

- An immediate \$100 increase per month for each adult on social assistance in Ontario. Right now a single person receives only \$585 each month, for all their needs.
- In the longer term, revised social assistance rates based on actual local living costs for social assistance recipients. This must become part of Ontario’s poverty reduction strategy.

A wide range of community leaders and concerned citizens across Ontario are showing their support for these goals through a powerful act of solidarity. They will live on a typical foodbank hamper diet for at least three days between October 4 and 8. A public launch for this effort is planned for October 4.

You can demonstrate your support play your role in this vital effort by:

- living for at least three days or up to one week on some of the limited food options faced by people on social assistance
- talking about this experience with members of your parish, friends, family, co-workers and local politicians – specifically your local MPP
- contacting your MPP and asking for support for the Put Food in the Budget demand

The basic steps for taking part are listed below.

Step 1: Recruit Challenge Team

You can take part on your own or with a group from our organization or from among your family and friends.

Ask members of your group how long they'd like to go on the diet (three days is the minimum request). Ask if people would like to keep a journal or blog about their experience as they take part. Discuss ways of sharing the experience afterwards.

Step 2 – Plan your diet and buy the food

Please see the detailed participant guideline beginning on page 3.

Step 3 – Post-diet reflection meeting

After October 8, hold a meeting of your Challenge team to discuss the experience. Some discussion questions can include

- How long did the food last?
- What was the hardest thing for you about the Challenge?
- How did the Challenge diet affect your physical or emotional health?
- Did you 'cheat'? How?
- What kinds of conversations did you have with friends, family, co-workers?
- What do you want people in the community to know from your experience?
- What do you want to tell our local MPP as a result of this experience?

Write a summary of your experiences and if possible, plan to arrange a visit with MPP after the week of October 4 – 8. If you cannot visit your MPP, please send a letter. Whether you have a meeting, or write a letter, in your contact with your MPP describe your experience with the Challenge, raise other issues you feel are relevant about the nature of poverty in your community, and ask him or her to support:

- An immediate increase of \$100 per month per adult in Ontario in order to 'Put Food in the Budget'. (We will have an information piece for you by then that talks about cost and provides rationale to support this expenditure).
- A commitment to revised social assistance rates based on actual local living costs, following consultations with community organizations to determine the appropriate level of support for social assistance recipients in Ontario.

Lastly, don't forget to celebrate! This is a major accomplishment. Bring together everyone who was involved – over a meal if you can – and pat yourselves on the back. Talk about what you accomplished and what you learned from this experience.

Guidelines for Participants:

Your Challenge: is to rely on a diet that a person on social assistance might receive from a food bank. If a person on social assistance received this food from a food bank in Ontario, it would be a three-day supply. For many, they would usually have to make it last even longer.

The challenge is for you to eat this food – and only this food – for three days to a week.

Before October 4th:

1. We recommend that you inform your family and friends of your participation in this project for the week. You will need their support to stay committed for the duration of the project.
2. Arrange to get your food for the week. There are two options

Option 1: Go to your local Food Bank – Contact your local food bank and let them know you are taking the Do the Math Challenge. Ask them if you can come in on a regular time the food bank is open and pick up a typical food hamper. Make arrangements to pay for the food hamper. Take public transit or walk to pick up your food hamper.

We recommend the first option if at all possible. If you are not sure of where your local food bank might be contact Mike Balkwill and he will help you.

Option 2: Use the list of food attached to this guideline that is appropriate – for example for you as a single person, or for two people or family if you are taking the Challenge with others. Remember the following:

- Take public transit – or walk - to do your ‘shopping’
- Purchase the lowest priced brand
- Bring your own bags. You don’t have 5 cents to spare and most food banks would also ask you to bring them.

During the Challenge Week – October 4th – 8th

1. We ask that you only eat meals prepared from contents in the food bank hamper and the Pantry List (see below). No eating out, no food or drinks at social gatherings, no coffee or tea or juice at meetings, or alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks bought for you by others, etc. If you are at a family gathering, dinner party, public event – you will need to say ‘no’ to other food.
2. The Pantry List consists of: Vegetable oil, flour, salt, sugar, coffee, tea, margarine, soy sauce, ketchup, garlic, spices. Participants can use up to 5 ingredients from this list, provided that they already have these items in their kitchen. We also ask that you **keep track of the quantity of each item used** from the Pantry List. This is very important.
3. It is recommended that participants eat at one or two meals at a drop-in. Please call 211 to find a location that is closest to you. We ask that you use the TTC or walk to go to the drop-ins.
4. Throughout the duration of the project, we ask that you share your experiences as candidly as possible. **Please try to share your thoughts at least once a day** – this can be as simple as writing a sentence, a paragraph, or a photo. I will soon be sending you an easy how to guide for posting your comments and pictures to our website which will drive media and public attention during the week of October 4 – 8.

If you are using social media programs such as Twitter or Facebook, we ask that you share your experiences on these platforms as well.

After the Challenge Week:

We have plans to do two things – bring together the members of the Provincial Challenge Team in the middle of October (date TBA) for a de-briefing together of the experience – and we expect some media would be present.

Hold a public town hall style meeting at the end of October at which there will be a public presentation of your experience.

Appendix – Sample Food Hamper Contents (Source – Fort York Food Bank)

Try and eat only what's on the list (along with five standard pantry ingredients – for example oil, flour, salt, coffee, tea) for at least three full days, and longer if you can, as it is the experience of people who use food banks to have to make the food last for a week or more.

Single person

- 2 boxes Kraft Dinner (or substitute extra rice if gluten-intolerant)
- 3 juice boxes
- 3 single-serving-size scoops dry rice
- 2 small cans soup
- box of dry cereal or 3 packages instant oatmeal
- any TWO of: 175 g tin of tuna, chicken or turkey; small jar peanut butter; 3 eggs
- 2 small cans of tinned vegetables, or 1 tin vegetables and 1 fruit
- 1 potato
- 1 onion
- 1 can plain beans or chickpeas, or 1 can pork and beans
- 3 granola bars or 3 fruit chews
- 1 quart milk
- 1 loaf bread (or substitute extra rice)

Two people

- 500 g dried pasta (or substitute extra rice)
- 1 small can tomato sauce or tomato paste
- 6 juice boxes
- 6 scoops dry rice
- 4 small cans soup
- 2 boxes of dry cereal or 6 packages instant oatmeal
- any FOUR of: 175 g tin of tuna, chicken or turkey; small jar peanut butter; 3 eggs (e.g. you could have 2 tins of chicken and 6 eggs, or two tins of tuna, one jar of peanut butter and 3 eggs, etc)
- 4 small cans of tinned vegetables, or 3 vegetables and 1 fruit
- 2 potatoes
- 1 onion
- 1 carrot
- 2 cans beans or pork and beans
- 6 granola bars or fruit chews
- 2 quarts milk
- 1 loaves bread (or substitute extra rice)

Family

- 900 g dried pasta (or extra rice)
- 2 small cans tomato sauce or tomato paste
- 3 juice boxes per person
- 2 small cans soup per person
- 1 small can prepared pasta (mac & cheese, spaghettios, etc)
- 3 scoops dry rice per person
- 1 box dry cereal per person or 3 packages instant oatmeal per person
- TWO per person of standard protein sources: (175 g tin of tuna, chicken or turkey; small jar peanut butter; 3 eggs) or one package chicken hot dogs, plus ONE additional protein source per person
- 2 small cans of vegetables per person, or substitute up to 2 cans tinned fruit
- 1 can beans or pork & beans per person
- 2 potatoes
- 1 onion
- 2 carrots
- 3 granola bars or fruit chews per person
- 1 quart milk per person
- 1 loaf bread per person (or extra rice)

Once you have your food supplies, you can plan menus for the three days, or longer if you are able to do so. Remember that you can make your food supplies last longer and deepen your experience by eating at a free community meal program in your neighbourhood, if possible.