

New research gives answers on the relationship between chronic illness and food insecurity

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Research findings provide direct evidence that people with chronic diseases are more likely to be food insecure - that is suffering from inadequate, insecure access to food as a result of financial constraints. Previous research has shown that food insecurity rates are highest among low-income households, in households reliant on social assistance, reporting Aboriginal status, renting rather than owning their dwelling, and lone-parent female-led (see recent annual report from PROOF). Even taken together though, these factors provide only a partial explanation for the vulnerability to food insecurity. New research by investigators at the Universities of Toronto and Calgary suggests that adults' health status is another determinant of whether or not households experience food insecurity.

The researchers used Statistics Canada data to examine how the [health status](#) of adults influenced the chances of their households being food insecure. Adults with [chronic health problems](#) (e.g., back problems, arthritis, migraines, diabetes, heart disease, and mental illness) were more likely than those without such health problems to live in [food insecure households](#). The researchers found a 'dose-response' relationship whereby the more chronic health problems someone had the more extreme their experience of food insecurity.

The researchers suggest two main reasons for these findings: 1. The additional cost of managing illness (drugs, travel to and from

appointments, special dietary needs etc.) results in people having less money to buy food, and 2. Coping with chronic illness also is likely to limit people's ability to manage with scarce resources - to shop around for bargains, to negotiate with creditors, to seek assistance from family, friends and charitable programs and employ the other tools that people have to use to try and manage the competing demands on their budget.

The study gives health professionals and policymakers new information to design interventions to prevent people with chronic illnesses from experiencing food insecurity and to lessen impacts on their immediate and long-term health.

More information: Valerie Tarasuk, Andrew Mitchell, Lindsay McLaren, and Lynn McIntyre, Chronic Physical and Mental Health Conditions among Adults May Increase Vulnerability to Household Food Insecurity, J. Nutr. 2013 jn.113.178483; first published online August 28, 2013. [DOI: 10.3945/jn.113.178483](https://doi.org/10.3945/jn.113.178483)

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