

# Paying for the price of convenience

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Meals prepared at home are cheaper than popular takeaway meals, and most remained cheaper even when accounting for the cost of preparation time.

This is the surprising finding of a University of Auckland study which compared the cost of six popular takeaway meals with similar meals prepared at home, either cooked from scratch or using pre-prepared items.

PhD student and Registered Nutritionist Sally Mackay, who led the study, 'Paying for convenience: comparing the cost of takeaway meals with their healthier home-cooked counterparts in New Zealand' says: "People usually perceive that takeaways are a cheap, quick alternative for a family meal, but we found that meals prepared at home do cost less with or without accounting for the [time costs](#).

"Meals assembled at home from pre-prepared items were particularly quick to prepare and can provide a healthy meal if items lower in sodium and saturated fat are chosen along with quick vegetable options."

Most previous studies did not include the time factor when calculating the cost of meals.

"We took the time to wait for the takeaway meals, and the time to prepare the homemade meals and calculated the added time cost based on the rate of the minimum wage," she says.

The meals were fish and chips; chicken, potatoes and coleslaw; butter chicken; beef chow mein; pizza and a burger. The home-made recipes were chosen from popular New Zealand recipe books, magazines and websites. The key ingredients and flavours of each type of meal were identified so the meals prepared at home were similar to the takeaway meals.

About ten different recipes were selected for each meal. For example, the home-made fish and chip meal had crumbed fish, potato wedges and seasonal vegetables. The home-assembled fish

and chip meal had frozen crumbed fish fillets, frozen potato chips and frozen vegetables.

The takeaway meals were higher in sodium and saturated fat than the home-cooked meals, and provided few vegetables, apart from beef chow mein.

For five out of six popular meals for a family of four, the mean costs of the home-made and home-assembled meals were cheaper than the mean cost of their takeaway counterparts. When the cost of time was added, the home-assembled meals were the cheapest and all but one of the home-made meals (fish and chips) was cheaper or the same price as the takeaway meal. When time was included, home-assembled meals were 16-48 percent cheaper than takeaway meals and home-made meals were 22 percent cheaper to 16 percent more expensive than takeaway meals.

For example, a takeaway chicken meal cost \$28.40, the home-made version cost \$15.26 and the home-assembled meal cost \$21.69. When the cost of preparation or waiting time was added, the takeaway chicken meal cost \$28.65, the home-made version cost \$21.69 and the home-assembled meal cost \$19.07.

Mackay says: "Meal preparation is often a trade-off between the cost of purchasing food and time available, but preparing a meal at home, even if it means using some pre-prepared items can save money without necessarily taking more time." Education and cooking skills training may be needed for some people to feel more confident about home cooked meals, but Mackay says that the first step is to bust the myth that takeaways are cheap.

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Provided by University of Auckland

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