



Will you save money if you stop eating meat?

Would you give up meat to save money? If not, there are other ways of reducing the cost and not doing away with meat altogether, finds **Angelique Ruzicka**

Last year, online caterer Caterwings said that consumption of meat by South Africans was down by 20%.

According to its meat price index, consumption had come down to 58.6kg of meat per person, with an average price of R78.55 per kilogram of beef leg round, while chicken averaged at R68.05/kg and fish at R161.31/kg.

It means the country's populace has to work harder and longer hours to be able to afford to buy meat. Meat isn't only expensive in South Africa though. According to the index, Switzerland has the highest meat prices, and is 141.9% more expensive than the average cost worldwide.

It is followed by Norway at 63.7% and Hong Kong at 61%. In the US, meat costs 10% more than the world average.

TIME TO GIVE UP MEAT?

According to a study published in the Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, vegetarians could save at least \$750 more than meat eaters every year.

The savings were calculated by comparing a US government-recommended weekly meal plan, which included meat, with a seven-day plant-based meal plan. Prices for all the ingredients were based on the cheapest brands available.

While removing meat from your diet may not be the "South African" thing to do, it could save you money in other areas too, such as medical bills and boosting your health.

According to Nathalie Mat, a registered dietitian and spokesperson for the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, reducing meat intake is unlikely to cause any harm.

"At worst you might experience an increase in bloating as you increase the amount of dietary fibre

This material has been copied under a Dalro licence and is not for resale or retransmission.

TALK TO US

Have you ever considered giving up red meat? What would you eat instead?

SMS us on 35697 using the keyword MEAT and tell us what you think. SMSes cost R1.50. Please include your name and province

you eat."

But she doesn't recommend cutting out meat entirely. Instead, she promotes the Mediterranean diet.

"The Mediterranean diet focuses on eating fresh produce, legumes and nuts, as well as seafood above red meat intake.

"The Mediterranean diet is considered one of the healthiest ways to eat. Rather than increased medical bills, you should expect lower bills," she says.

Besides cutting down on your medical bills, a meat-free diet could also increase your lifespan.

"A diet high in meat and animal products may cause more inflammation in the body than a vegetarian diet. [US author] Dan Buettner wrote a book about Blue Zones - populations where people live long and in good health. One of the blue zones is the Seventh Day Adventists in California. Many of these old and healthy Californians are vegetarians.

"He attributes their low rates of disease to their antioxidant-rich diet. Avoiding meat lowers the total burden of cancer-causing chemicals that our bodies have to process. Eating a rainbow of fresh produce helps to repair the daily damage from the free radicals we are exposed to," explains Mat.

CUTTING DOWN THE PRICE OF MEAT

There are many other reasons consumers give up meat besides the cost, such as bad animal husbandry practices, the desire to reduce their carbon footprint, health concerns and weight management.

"Reducing your meat intake lowers your carbon footprint significantly.

"Meat contains a lot of kilojoules in a small portion - especially the fatty cuts.

"If you replace these with naturally lean sources of protein like beans, you may lose weight without feeling hungry," adds Mat.

However, if reducing the cost of your grocery basket is your main reason, there are many ways you can reduce consumption of meat and the price you spend on it. And you don't even have to do it all at once.

1 Embrace the concept of Meat-Free Mondays:

This is something you could start tomorrow. It's a movement that is encouraging people to give up meat for just one day a week. For more information, go to supportmfm.co.za.

2 Plan your meals around what produce is on sale:

To save money, buy items that are on sale rather than what you "feel like cooking" on the day, and devise a meal around it. There are lots of recipes that you can get online for inspiration.

3 Make use of your freezer:

Buy in bulk to save money and make use of your freezer to store meats that you bought on volume and at a discount.

4 Try cheaper cuts of meat:

This can be intimidating at first as you may not know how to prepare or cook them, but ask your butcher for advice or go online to find easy recipes.

5 Be prepared to trim the meat yourself:

Buying meat that has already been cut usually costs more. To save cash, be prepared to do all the dicing, slicing or butterflying yourself. Invest in a good knife to make the job easier.