

Gasoline Cheaper than Cookies and More Than Grapes

Figuring there's not much I can do about it, I rarely stress over the price of a gallon of gasoline. (I did, however, cringe last week when the total topped \$60.00 to bring my fuel gauge to full). That same day, I got an email from a friend comparing the price, per gallon, of gasoline to many other "liquids" that so many of us commonly consume. It was intriguing enough to make me do some calculations on my own.

The math is easy. You simply divide the price of the item by the volume, throw in a few conversion factors, and you've got the price per gallon. I started with beverages, all available – of course – at a convenience store gas station. The results were shocking!

12 oz can of soda - \$3.58/gallon
Bottled water – \$6.80/gallon
Diet Green Tea with Citrus = \$9.40/gallon
Vitamin Water - \$12.10/gallon
12 oz white chocolate mocha latte - \$45.00/gallon

Yikes! Who knew that when we plunk down a couple of bucks for some liquid refreshment we're paying at least the price of gasoline if not twelve or thirteen times more! What's interesting is that we don't often hear people complain about the price of these items or refuse to purchase them. Perhaps we just don't realize the cost, or perhaps it's a cost we're willing to pay. Maybe it's because these items "only" cost a few dollars per purchase versus the \$60.00 per fill-up.

As a dietitian, I'll often hear folks complain that healthy food is too expensive or that stopping for fast-food is cheaper than eating at home. Occasionally this is true, but more often than not the reality is that the healthy stuff isn't as expensive as it appears to be. For fun, I spent some extra time in the grocery store this weekend, comparing prices for healthy versus "unhealthy" foods. Again, the results were amazing. Did you know, for example, that Fritos Scoops cost \$3.34 per pound and that Fruit by the Foot (fruit roll-ups) is \$6.34 per pound? And convenience has its price. Individually wrapped Rice Krispie Treats are \$6.02 per pound and the little 100 Calorie Packs of cookies and chips average \$9.50 per pound. These prices make grapes look like a steal at \$1.98 per pound and should have us leaping with joy over bananas at 48 cents per pound. Interestingly, I've heard lots of people stand in the produce aisle say "I'm not paying \$2.98 a pound for asparagus" but I've never heard the same comment in the cookie aisle!

If you add in the price of cavities, heart disease, diabetes and blood pressure medications, plus the cost of missing work for health-related issues, there is no comparison. The healthy food is the bargain. And, while I don't agree with the method behind the madness of the price of gasoline, one might argue there are health-related "side effects" to be had. If people are driving less, are they walking more? Are we saving the environment –and thus indirectly improving our health – by using less fuel? Are people taking advantage of Bike to Work Month and, as a consequence, losing some weight or improving their mood? I know on a personal note that I've enjoyed the carpooling time in the car with my daughter and her friends, and I try to savor these precious "teenager moments" when I'm still part of the crowd.