

Meal Planning: Healthy Eating On A Budget

With careful meal planning, shopping, and cooking you can trim both **your waistline** and your food budget. Frequent eating out can be disastrous to your pocketbook. (Spending \$5 a day on a "value meal" for lunch adds up to more than \$1,200 per year.) Here are some suggestions to help you get the most of your **food budget**.

Monthly budgeting and planning

- Each month, determine how much money you have for food and divide that number by four to come up the amount of money you can spend each week.
- Plan meals and snacks for your family *before* you go shopping.
- Use the foods you have on hand first and **use leftovers for meals** during the week.
- Base your diet on the **Food Guide Pyramid** recommendations.
- Use coupons **ONLY** if they make items you *usually buy* cost even less.
- Always check newspaper ads or store flyers for weekly specials.
- Finally, review your shopping list and budget. If it doesn't fit, try again.

Shopping strategies that save money

- **Shop the perimeter of the store first** where you'll find the basics for a healthful diet (produce, meats and dairy) instead of stacking your cart with junk food fillers.
- Unit prices for food are displayed on the shelves below the foods and tell you how much the **food costs** per ounce. Use the unit price to compare costs between brands and different sized packages. Divide the total price by the number of ounces to come up with the unit price per ounce. Choose the cheaper variety!
- Choose generic whenever possible.
- Check higher or lower shelves for cheaper items because more expensive items are kept at eye-level.
- Watch for mistakes at the checkout line and always double check your receipt and change.

- Be sure to put refrigerated and frozen items in the cart last and store and handle these foods properly so that they do not spoil.

Inexpensive ways to buy produce

- Buy apples, oranges, grapefruit, potatoes, onions, etc., by the bag, not by the piece—it's cheaper and will fill more lunch bags and cover more meals.
- Always shop for **produce that's in season**, for the best flavor and prices. Compare **frozen and fresh produce**; buy the cheaper variety; they are equally nutritious.
- When buying canned foods, choose those that are packed in juice and low sodium.
- Avoid the temptation of buying bagged/washed lettuce, cabbage and carrots; it costs more but you get less quantity.

Best ways to buy grains to keep within your budget

- Choose plain brown rice and whole wheat English muffins and tortillas (should contain less than 4 grams of fat per 100 calories).
- Oatmeal is nutritious, economical and can be dressed up with brown sugar, bananas, etc.
- Check out the day old breads (a great value and still fresh).
- Buy **cereals and other grains** without fancy packaging (in bulk) to store in airtight containers.
- Whole wheat pasta is healthier but more expensive than white, so use a little of each!

Most economical way to buy meats/meat substitutes

- Ready-to-cook **meats** are more expensive (e.g. marinated boneless, skinless chicken). Buy plain and skin/season yourself.
- Buy 90% lean ground beef instead of 95% lean; just make sure to drain the extra fat after cooking.
- Use canned fish and chicken for sandwiches, enchiladas, casseroles, and salads.
- Extend your protein dollars by eating two or more meatless meals weekly.
- Soups, stews, chili, and spaghetti with sauce stretch your food dollars further and make filling meals (more veggies and potatoes or rice, less meat).

How to economise when buying dairy products

- Used dried milk powder for recipes, use fluid **milk for drinking** (choose skim or 1%).
- Buy block cheese and shred it yourself for recipes (versus pre-shredded).

Cooking and meal planning tips

- Cook extra portions of chili and spaghetti with marinara sauce for the freezer. They make great baked potato and pizza toppings.
- Keep a bag of frozen vegetables to add to rice or any meals.
- Boil extra pasta or rice for a main meal; it will make a cold lunch with chopped tomato, veggies, and/or a grilled chicken breast.
- Keep pita bread in the freezer. Pop in the toaster and it makes a great sandwich pocket or pizza base (spread with tomato sauce and other toppings).
- Worcestershire, brown, chili and **soy sauces** can add zing to an otherwise forgettable dish, as well as mixed herbs, chili pepper, black pepper, curry powder, and Chinese spices.

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