

Nutritional Quarterly

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Eating Better on a Budget

11 tips to help you stretch your food dollars

Get the most for your food budget! There are many ways to save money on the foods that you eat. The three main steps are planning before you shop, purchasing the items at the best price, and preparing meals that stretch your food dollars.

1 - Plan, Plan, Plan Ahead!

Before you head to the grocery store, plan your meals and snacks for the week. Include meals like stews, casseroles, or stir-fries, which “stretch” expensive items into more portions. Check to see what foods you already have and make a list for what you need to buy. Take a shopping list with you and try to buy only the items on the list.

2 - Get the Best Price

Check the local newspaper, online, and at the store for sales and coupons. Ask about a loyalty discount card for extra savings at stores where you shop. Look for specials or sales on meat and seafood—often the most expensive items on your list.



3 - Compare and Contrast

Locate the “Unit Price” on the shelf directly below the product. Use it to compare different brands and different sizes of the same brand to determine which is more economical.

4 - Buy in Bulk

It is almost always cheaper to buy foods in bulk. Smart choices are family packs of chicken, steak, or

fish and larger bags of potatoes and frozen vegetables. Before you shop, remember to check if you have enough freezer space.

5 - Buy in Season

Buying fruits and vegetables in season can lower the cost and add to the freshness! If you are not going to use them all right away, buy some that still need time to ripen.

6 - Convenience Costs... Go Back to the Basics

Convenience foods like frozen dinners, pre-cut vegetables, and instant rice, oatmeal, or grits will cost you more than if you were to make them from scratch. Take the time to prepare your own—and save!

7 - Choose Healthier Foods

Get more nutrition for your money by choosing nutrient-dense foods: vegetables and fruits, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, whole grains, seafood, lean meats, and other healthy foods. Avoid sweets and snack foods that give you fewer nutrients for your food dollars.

Before you buy, think about how much of a product you'll really use. Buy only enough fresh fruits and vegetables to eat within a few days. Also, try not to buy more perishable items than you will use before the “use-by” date marked on the package. Meats, poultry, fish, seafood, cooked vegetables, dairy products, and eggs are examples of perishable foods.

8 - Easy on your Wallet

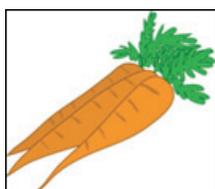
Certain foods are typically low-cost options all year round. Try beans for a less expensive protein food. For vegetables, buy carrots, greens, or potatoes. As for fruits, apples and bananas are good choices.

9 - Cook Once...Eat All Week!

Prepare a large batch of favorite recipes on your day off (double or triple the recipe). Freeze in individual containers. Use them throughout the week and you won't have to spend money on take-out meals.

10 - Get your Creative Juices Flowing

Spice up your leftovers—use them in new ways. For example, try leftover chicken in a stir-fry or over a garden salad, or to make chicken chili. Remember, throwing away food is throwing away your money!



Sharing meal preparation and ingredient costs with friends can also save money -- and be fun. For instance, you might plan a potluck dinner with neighbors. You might also buy ingredients and cook with a friend.

11 - Eating Out

Restaurants can be expensive. Save money by getting the early bird special, going out for lunch instead of dinner, going to restaurants that offer senior discounts, or looking for "2 for 1" deals. Stick to water instead of ordering other beverages, which add to the bill.

Help With Food Costs

If you need financial help to buy food, here are some federal programs for older people with limited budgets.

- **The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program** gives coupons to older adults with low incomes that can be used at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and some other places. The cou-

pons can be exchanged for fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs. For more information, go to www.fns.usda.gov/wic/seniorFMNP/sfmnpmenu.htm.

- **The SNAP program, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (formerly known as the Food Stamp program) helps qualified people buy groceries. The program helps people with a low income or salary get enough to eat, and they encourage good nutrition and health. Find out more at www.fns.usda.gov/snap.
- **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program** provides some vegetables, fruits, grain products, dry beans and canned meats to eligible older people to supplement their own food. Find out more at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csf.
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program** provides food needed by low-income older adults who might not have enough to eat. Find out more at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/tefap/.
- **The Child and Adult Care Food Program** provides meals and snacks to eligible older adults taking part in adult day care programs. Find out more at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/.

Free and Low-cost Meals

You might also be able to enjoy free or low-cost meals at places in your community. These meals offer good food and a chance to be with other people. Contact your local senior center or places of worship to find out about these meals. Home-delivered meals may be available for people who can't get out.

To Learn More

For more information about these and other food assistance programs, including home-delivered meals, contact your Area Agency on Aging at 1-814-443-2681, or call the Eldercare Locator toll-free at 1-800-677-1116.

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet16EatingBetterOnABudget>

<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/eatingwellasyougetolder/eatwellonyourbudget/01>