

# Healthy eating on a budget

Eating a balanced diet has lifelong health benefits, no matter your age or current health status.

Nutritious meals are commonly thought to be more expensive than other choices, but that doesn't have to be the case. Eating healthy can be afforded by many by limiting food waste and being intentional about your dietary habits.

## Top tips for eating healthy on a budget



Cook meals at home often



Shop with a list



Use coupons



Look for discount brands



Compare similar products



Purchase in-season produce



Incorporate meatless meals



Buy items in bulk

# Tips for eating healthy on a budget

Nutritious foods don't have to break the bank. Consider the following tips for healthy eating on a budget.

## 1. Cook meals at home often

One of the simplest ways to eat healthier on a budget is by cooking meals at home often. Frequently eating at home is associated with a greater intake of nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables. Preparing meals at home also allows you to be in control of the ingredients added to your dish. Excess sodium, added sugars, and unhealthy oils are often used in commercial or restaurant food preparation. Eating at home is also generally cheaper per person than eating out on a regular basis.

## 2. Plan ahead

Creating a meal plan and shopping list can help reduce impulse purchases and keep the grocery bill within budget. Prepare for your grocery shopping trip with the following steps.

### Check your current food supply

Healthy meals don't have to be complicated. Keep things simple by starting with what you already have in your refrigerator and pantry. Make a list of your current stock and consider what recipes you can make with what you already have. Get inspiration by searching the internet, borrowing a cookbook from the library or a friend, or watching your favorite cooking show.

### Look for coupons

Getting coupons from the local paper, online, or through a loyalty program can be a helpful way to save money at the grocery store. Consider bulking up on shelf-stable items that are on sale, such as canned beans and brown rice, and using sale items to guide your meal plan for the week.

### Plan your recipes

Come up with a meal plan that works for you and your budget. Keep your schedule in mind, as busier days may benefit from keeping meals simple. Consider using recipes with common ingredients that can be used for multiple meals. For example, canned tuna could be used for a tasty tuna sandwich one day, then a warm tuna casserole later in the week. Using different herbs and spices can help make the same ingredient taste different in each dish.

### Shop with a list

Once you know what you need from the grocery store, write it down in a list and bring it with you to the grocery store. At the store, stick to your budget by purchasing only what you need on your list. Grocery lists also make shopping easier and faster, and ensure you get all of the ingredients you need in one trip.

### 3. Compare similar products

At the grocery store there are a lot of different foods to choose from, which can make it difficult to find the most nutritious and cost-effective options. Comparing similar products by assessing their nutritional value and cost per serving can be helpful when trying to choose budget-friendly healthy foods.

#### Check the unit price

Some grocery items may have a lower retail price (total cost) but a higher unit price. The unit price identifies the cost per serving or weight, such as cost per pound or ounce. A lower unit price indicates a better value, even if the retail price is higher than comparable products. For example, food sold in single-serving packaging often has a higher unit price than the full-size version. Buying the full-size product and creating individual portions at home is one way to save money.

If the unit price isn't listed, it can be calculated with the following equation:  $\text{Unit price} = \frac{\text{Total price}}{\text{Total size}}$

Buying foods in larger package sizes, such as in bulk or family size, is often the way to get the lowest unit price. Save money by buying regularly eaten, non-perishable items (e.g., rice, pasta) and freezable items (e.g., meat, frozen vegetables) in bulk.

#### Look for discount brands

Many grocery stores carry generic or store-brand versions of products that cost less than the name brand. Items like canned vegetables, dairy products, oils, and frozen fruits and vegetables are usually available in a cheaper store-brand version.

#### Read the Nutrition Facts label

Not all similar products at the grocery store have similar ingredients. Checking the Nutrition Facts label is another tool for healthy eating on a budget. The Nutrition Facts label is a convenient tool that can be used to assess calories, nutrients, and serving sizes of various foods. Try to avoid processed foods and consider food choices with less saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.



## 4. Purchase in-season produce

When fresh fruits and vegetables are in season, more supply is available, resulting in lower prices.

Fruits and vegetables that aren't currently in season can typically be found cheaper in canned or frozen instead of fresh. Certain fresh produce is usually low cost at anytime throughout the year including:

- Apples
- Bananas
- Carrots
- Green peppers
- Lettuce
- Oranges

Be considerate of how much produce you will eat throughout the week, as fresh produce spoils faster than canned or frozen produce. Try to buy a combination of fresh, frozen, and shelf-stable fruits and vegetables.

### In-season produce



#### Spring

Apricots  
Asparagus  
Avocados  
Cabbage  
Garlic  
Kale  
Kiwifruit  
Lettuce  
Mushrooms  
Onions  
Peas  
Pineapple  
Radishes  
Rhubarb  
Spinach  
Strawberries  
Swiss chard  
Turnips

#### Summer

Apricots  
Avocados  
Beets  
Bell peppers  
Berries  
Cherries  
Corn  
Cucumbers  
Eggplant  
Garlic  
Green beans  
Mangos  
Melons  
Peaches  
Plums  
Summer squash  
Tomatoes  
Watermelon  
Zucchini

#### Fall

Beets  
Bell peppers  
Broccoli  
Brussels sprouts  
Cauliflower  
Cranberries  
Garlic  
Ginger  
Grapes  
Green beans  
Kiwifruit  
Leafy greens  
Mushrooms  
Onions  
Parsnips  
Peas  
Potatoes/yams  
Radishes  
Raspberries

#### Winter

Beets  
Brussels sprouts  
Cabbage  
Collard greens  
Grapefruit  
Kiwifruit  
Leeks  
Onions  
Oranges  
Parsnips  
Pears  
Pineapples  
Potatoes  
Pumpkin  
Rutabaga  
Sweet potatoes  
Swiss chard  
Turnips  
Winter squash

#### Available year-round

Apples  
Bananas

Carrots  
Celery

Lemons  
Limes

Frozen, canned,  
and dried fruits  
and vegetables



## 5. Incorporate meatless meals

Animal protein, such as lean meats and poultry, is commonly used as a protein source in North American diets. Protein is an essential macronutrient that plays a role in several functions within the body, including muscle and tissue repair and hormone regulation. Protein-packed foods also help keep you satiated (full) longer than carbohydrate or high-fat foods.

However, over the past several years, the price of meat has steadily increased. Since December 2020, prices of beef have risen 14% in the United States. Incorporating meatless meals into your dietary plan can help you save money. Budget-friendly beans, lentils, and peas cost significantly less than a similar amount of other protein foods.



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