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Healthy Eating on a Budget

2010

Eating healthier on a budget can often seem very challenging. Not only does eating healthier often seem so much more expensive, but what to eat and how to prepare it can be a challenge. When you're on a tight budget, the thought of preparing tasty, healthy meals on a regular basis can seem impossible.

You can save money and still eat healthily.

The Next Step: Smart Planning, Buying and Serving

It can take getting used to, but you should set aside time regularly for planning meals, making your grocery list, and the actual grocery shopping. If you make it part of your regular activities it won't seem like work! Be aware of where you currently spend your grocery budget and begin to modify it to include healthier, more economic options.

Menu planning often gets overlooked as part of our plan; we often go to the store with the same list of items every time. This can create a "menu rut" which often leads us to eating more expensive convenience foods instead of healthy choices. Remember to include some healthy snacks in planning.

Buying smart is easiest if we simply plan to buy as many **whole foods** as possible. Whole food is best described as any food in its natural form: unprepared, unprocessed foods that are ready for our personal love and attention. These foods may require more effort to prepare, but the result will be tastier and almost always healthier. If we plan our menu based on what is in season (usually the items that are on sale in the produce department) and decide that we are going to jump in and begin to cook more and more from scratch, the result will be a reduction in food cost and an increase in healthier foods.

Smart serving is best done when we have a positive attitude about preparing the food we eat. If we try new things and remember to keep it fun and interesting, cooking might not seem like a chore at all.

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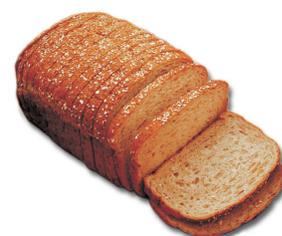
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Tips from the Food Groups

Grain Products

Grains such as bread, pasta, oats, and whole grain rice are a healthy source of food energy and can be the most economical part of your menu. Choose whole grain products (like brown rice) more often for their higher nutritional content.

- Rice and pasta that come with sauce or flavorings are more expensive and often higher in salt, preservatives and even fats.
- Whole grain cereals are generally more nutritious and economical than those with added sugar.
- Buy from bakeries at the end of the day for discounts; remember that breads freeze extremely well.
- Long grain rice is half the cost of minute rice.
- Choose whole grain and brown grains more often to maximize healthy fiber intake.
- If you need to limit your intake of carbohydrates, make sure you are aware of the carbohydrate count in the grain products you choose and fit them into your meal plan responsibly.



Vegetables and Fruit

Vegetables and fruit are usually rich in essential vitamins and nutrients. Choose dark green, bright yellow and orange vegetables and fruits more often for the extra nutrients they provide. This food group should be a part of every meal. Apples, oranges, bananas, cabbage, and carrots are great, low cost choices.

- Buy fruits in season and freeze them for later.
- If you buy frozen vegetables, avoid the types with added sauces.
- Try making your own coleslaw; cabbage is cheaper and more nutritious than lettuce.
- Purchase reduced-price produce items like tomatoes and peppers in bulk when available and make large batches of pasta sauces or chili to freeze.
- Make a point of trying a new fruit or vegetable. Make a note of something in the store, and then research a little before buying and preparing it. It can open up new tastes and options to you!



Dairy products

Dairy products are an important source of protein and calcium, which contributes to strong bones and teeth. Skim milk and plain yogurt are economical and healthy choices.

- Choose no-name, lower fat cheeses.
- Skim milk powder can be half the cost of regular milk and is easy to store. It can be used anywhere regular milk is used.
- Try fat-free and lighter versions of yogurt, sour cream, or cottage cheese – you may be surprised at how little difference there is in taste.
- Yogurt that is nearing its expiration date can be frozen and saved for a few more weeks – eating the yogurt somewhat frozen can be a great treat.
- There are great non-dairy (lactose-free) products for those who cannot have dairy, soy being one of the most widely available; these can, however, be much more expensive.

Fish, Meats, and Alternatives

Fish, meats, and alternatives are important sources of protein, which help build and maintain muscles. Less expensive protein sources include peanut butter, dried beans, eggs, and tuna.

- Meats are usually the most expensive food item but the recommended portions are small (2.5 oz/70g)
- Purchase cheaper cuts of meat and cook them at a lower temperature for a longer time.
- Utility-grade poultry may be missing a wing or a leg but is otherwise perfect.
- Use dried or canned beans and lentils as often as possible. They are an economical substitute for meat, are lower in fat, and a source of fibre.
- Frozen fish is often less expensive than fresh fish.
- Soy products like tofu can be an amazingly healthy and economic option; stay open-minded and find a great recipe to try before buying.
- Reduced meats can be a great way to save money; if you are unsure of what to buy, ask grocery store staff for advice.



Important Reminders:

You can begin with a quick review of the basic tips of healthy eating:

- Limit your intake of junk food
- Limit your intake of alcohol
- Drink lots of water (at least 8 cups a day)
- Limit salty and sugary foods
- Avoid eating many foods that are high in saturated and/or trans fats
- Make “variety” a keyword of your eating habits

Don't Discount the Discounts:

You can often get good buys on breads, meats, certainly produce and even other items marked for quick sale before they go bad.

Don't be afraid to buy them or ask a grocery store worker for more information on the reduced products if you are unsure.

Surf the Internet for recipes that use specific ingredients by simply entering it in as a keyword to your favorite search engine. The results can be fun, exciting and even inspiring.

Stretching Your Dollar Further:

It can often seem more challenging to find bargains on healthy foods, especially if we are shopping for only ourselves. Many deals on groceries come from purchasing in bulk or multiples. If your budget doesn't allow you to stock up to save, try shopping with friends or family who could benefit from the savings and who use similar products. It can greatly increase your ability to save and share the rewards!

Useful Resources:



Visit the Dietitians of Canada web site at www.dietitians.ca for more information or

http://www.bcma.org/public/patient_advocacy/patient_pamphlets/eating_on_a_budget.htm

Final Thoughts: There's no trick or formula to eating healthier on a budget. Like anything else worthwhile, it takes some planning, creativity, and even extra work at the beginning. Hopefully, if you think of the rewards – better health and more money – you'll find it's worth the effort. The effort also lessens with practice and developing the new habit.

You may have days when you eat prepared foods or even fast food; in fact no one says you shouldn't. Limiting these activities and remembering that cooking can be an adventure are the first steps toward eating healthily on a budget. There is a wonderful sense of accomplishment that can come from serving food we have prepared to rave reviews from family and friends.