



## Cooking Fast Healthy Meals on a Budget

- *If you plan it, IT will come.* Plan your menu in advance, and around sales. Check out several weekly sale circulars, and then look for other available coupons (i.e. company websites and apps for coupons, or your grocery store loyalty card savings) on the same items for additional savings. Check for in-store deals like "manager's specials" or foods close to their expiration date. Compare national brands and private store labels for the lowest price.
- Once you've identified sale items, plan to incorporate them into simple meals — baked, grilled or broiled lean meats and fish, vegetables and whole grains are delicious and healthy with few added ingredients.
- Make a menu of meals for the week — don't overbuy and end up wasting food because it went bad before you had time to eat it. Keep a running grocery list in a common area (i.e. on the fridge or on an app/site that the family can all access) of items that have run out or that a family member is requesting. Use your weekly meal plan to create a master grocery list, and stick to it along with the items kept on the "fridge" list. Keep in mind, that each trip to the supermarket will cost you extra time and gas money. By keeping a list, you won't have to run out for single items. Plus, fewer trips to the grocery store = fewer impulse buys.
- When creating your menus, have a plan for leftovers such as making sandwiches, casseroles, soups, etc. with extra servings of chicken or pot roast.
- Prioritize your food dollars for nutrient-rich vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy, lean protein and whole grains. To keep your grocery list from growing too long, prepare meals that include similar ingredients throughout the week. Skip highly processed items and packaged snack foods, which can increase your total spending and fill your cart with not-so-healthy items.
- Think canned and frozen. Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables often are rich in nutrients because they are harvested and packaged at their peak of nutrition and quality, and are less expensive than their fresh counterparts. Opt for lower sodium or no-added salt or sugar varieties canned beans/vegetables, canned or frozen fruit. They're great to have on hand when you're short on fresh options. Be sure to choose no-salt-added, no-sugar-added or less sodium varieties of these fruits/veggies.
- Consider organizing your list into sections according to the layout of the supermarket. This cuts down on time and the number of passes you need to make through the aisles. Aim to stick to the parameter of the store, avoiding excessive time spent in the middle isles.



## Ready to roll-Shopping Tips in the Store

- ✓ **Invite the kids.** Shop with your kids and show them how to choose healthy fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ **Do not shop when you're hungry**-have a snack beforehand if it's been a while since you've eaten. If hungry, you're more likely to make impulse purchases on less nutritious items that cost more.
- ✓ **At first,** expect to spend a little extra time buying groceries-you're learning!
- ✓ **Don't reward with candy.** Don't use candy as a reward for your kids' good behavior while shopping. Consider non-food prizes i.e. balloon, stuffed toy, etc.
- ✓ **You'll save the most money on sales for meats.** Consider purchasing a larger quantity of meat (poultry or fish too) that is on sale. You can freeze for later use, or you could try preparing enough for two or more meals. Enjoy leftovers later in the week or freeze for future use. Wrap meats in a freezer bag before freezing. Because meat/fish/poultry is often the highest dollar ingredient in a recipe, consider adding a meatless meal several times each week, or try replacing half the meat in dishes such as chili, meatloaf or burger patties with beans or chopped vegetables. i.e. Meatless Monday. Incorporating other inexpensive non-meat proteins, such as beans, lentils, unsalted nuts or peanut butter, eggs, tofu, or low sodium tuna can be cost-effective and nutritious.
- ✓ **Shop the bulk foods aisle.** Many stores offer bulk herbs, spices, nuts, dried fruits, whole grains, dried beans, breakfast cereals and other items at discounted prices. Sometimes these are whole foods, which means you are getting an added bonus of healthier options for less money. Whole grains (oats, brown rice, barley) as well as dried beans and peas are generally inexpensive and are an easy way to get more nutrition for your buck. You can buy in bulk, prepare ahead time and then freeze so you have protein- and fiber-rich foods on hand at all times. Stock up on these nonperishable items when they are on sale, or take advantage of the bulk bin to purchase only the amount you need.
- ✓ **Stock up on staples when they go on sale.** Browse your grocery aisles for sale items and stock up on foods you can store in the pantry and freezer. Load your cart with non-perishables such as canned and bottled goods; whole-grain pastas, crackers and cereals; brown rice; tomato sauces and nut butters.
- ✓ **Stick with Generic.** Consider purchasing the generic/store brand of packaged foods — they usually are a better value than commercially branded items. Compare ingredients lists and Nutrition Facts panels. Store brands often are as good or better than the pricier name brand.

## Get into a Frugal Frame of Mind

- **Start a Love Affair with Your Freezer.** When you prepare a recipe, double it and put the extra portions in the freezer. You'll be glad it's there on that night when nothing goes as planned. Instead of calling for home delivery, you can zap a delicious meal that you know your family loves. When freezing, add a date to the outside package and eat the items with the earlier dates first.
- **Do a 5-minute inventory of your refrigerator at least twice a week.** Find a use for everything before it goes bad. Toss wilting vegetables into a pot of soup or spaghetti sauce. Freeze leftovers for another day and ripe bananas for banana bread or smoothies.

## In the Produce Section

- When it comes to vegetables and fruits shop in season and in its most basic form. Local, seasonal produce is at its peak flavor and is generally more abundant, so it's sold at a lower price. Produce in season will vary for each family, so it pays to become familiar with what is growing locally. Take a family trip to your farmers market to stock up on locally-grown fare and connect to those who grow your food. If the produce item you want isn't in season, look for it in the freezer section.
- Buying fruits or veggies in bulk, such as bags of apples or potatoes (sweet and white potatoes are low-cost filling options) may be cheaper than buying individual pieces.

## Reduce Waste

Once you've done your shopping, make the most of your food spending by cutting down on waste. Plan to use highly perishable items — such as fish and seafood, salad greens, berries and fresh herbs — early in the week, and save more hearty items (apples, pears, root vegetables (carrots, potatoes, beets), cauliflower, Brussel Sprouts for later in the week.

## Leftovers

Enjoy leftovers for lunch or create new meals from leftover ingredients. Cooked meat and vegetables can be revamped as a filling for a casserole, frittata or soup.



## Cooking Made Fast and Easy

**Use a slow cooker or Insta-pot.** This handy kitchen appliance uses a moist heat method of cooking which helps tenderize less expensive but tougher cuts of meat. Stretch that meat dollar further by adding frozen vegetables or beans to your slow cooker recipes. Meals from a slow cooker are hearty and filling.

**Cook meals in large batches, then freeze for later.** Batch cook and freeze meals over the weekend when you have more time. On weekdays, all you have to do is take a meal out of the freezer and simply reheat. You also can use leftovers from a roast or chicken to make a stir-fry, tacos or soup other days of the week.

### Quick proteins:

- ✓ Eggs-Do not forget breakfast for dinner: "brinner"
- ✓ Canned low-sodium beans
- ✓ Pre-cooked grilled chicken breast (no added salt) or Rotisserie chicken (skip the skin)
- ✓ Lean, ground meat-brown in pan



### Quick grains/starches:

- ✓ Whole wheat couscous
- ✓ Quinoa
- ✓ Whole Wheat Pasta (full/partial i.e. Ronzoni Smart Taste), bean-based (i.e. Bonza)
- ✓ Frozen or dry quick-cooking brown rice (Trader Joes, Minute Rice, Uncle Bens)
- ✓ Canned low sodium beans
- ✓ Frozen peas or corn (YES-these starchy veggies are great sources of fiber, vitamins and minerals; when combined in a meal, have a lower glycemic impact)

### Quick veggies:

- ✓ Used bag of pre-cut broccoli and/or cauliflower florets or chop off greens on head of cauliflower; steam or microwave with a little water in microwave safe disk, covered with paper towel.
  - ✓ Bag or box of baby spinach-Sauté
  - ✓ Bag of baby carrots or green beans-Steam
  - ✓ Bagged lettuce, pre-shredded carrots, cabbage, cherry or grape tomatoes
- \*There is extra cost associated with convenience, so be strategic about produce purchases. The most expensive likely will be pre-cut and packaged produce.

Source: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Other resources: [www.budgetbites.com](http://www.budgetbites.com) [www.eatingwell.com](http://www.eatingwell.com)