

Tips for Healthy, Thrifty Meals

How can you serve healthy meals on a limited budget? It takes some time and planning, but you and your family can eat better for less.

Tips for Planning

When you plan meals and snacks, include a variety of foods for a healthy diet: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and meat alternatives (such as eggs and peanut butter).

Check weekly newspaper ads for specials and plan menus using those foods.

Build the main part of your meal around rice, noodles, or other grains. Use small amounts of meat, poultry, fish or eggs to stretch your budget. Try one-dish meals such as rice, vegetables, and chicken.

Use leftovers to save both time and money. For example, cooked meats and vegetables can be used in soups and stews.

Prepare foods yourself. Most pre-prepared foods (such as frozen meals, grated cheese) cost more.

Tips for Shopping

Make a list of the foods that you need. Check to see what you have on hand (including leftovers). Stick to the list to avoid “impulse” purchases.

Shop only once a week or less. The more you shop, the more you spend.

Shop at stores with the best prices. Costs may be higher at mini-marts than at warehouse-type stores.

Look for the “unit price” tag on shelves to compare costs. Store (generic) brands and large sizes usually cost less per unit (such as ounce or cup).

Use coupons only for food that you would buy anyway.

Buy only the amount that your family will eat before it spoils.

Stock up on sale foods if you have room to store them.

Some Best Buys

Breads and grains	<p>Look for bargains on day-old bread and bakery products.</p> <p>Buy regular rice and oatmeal instead of the instant and flavored types.</p> <p>Buy lower cost brands of ready-to-eat cereals.</p>
Fruits and vegetables	<p>Buy fresh fruits and vegetables when they are in season.</p> <p>Buy bags of plain frozen vegetables.</p> <p>Prepare carrots and salad greens yourself rather than buying them in bags.</p> <p>Try lower cost brands of canned or frozen fruits and vegetables.</p>
Milk and milk products	<p>Buy low fat or nonfat milk.</p> <p>Buy milk in larger containers (such as half-gallons) if you can use that much.</p> <p>Buy less expensive cheese such as mild cheddar.</p>
Meat and poultry	<p>Look for specials at the meat counter.</p> <p>Buy less expensive meat.</p> <p>Buy whole chickens and cut them yourself.</p>
Dry beans and peas	<p>Substitute these for meat, poultry and fish sometimes.</p>
Bulk foods	<p>Buy bulk foods (sold in bins) to get just the amount that you need.</p>

For more information:

Recipes and Tips for Healthy, Thrifty Meals (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/>

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