
Eating on a Budget

Healthy eating while managing a budget can be overwhelming. It can be even more stressful when starting a new food plan. Many people think that eating healthfully requires a lot of money, but it doesn't have to. In fact, it is possible to save money if you plan out your budget, meals, and shopping trips in advance. Here are some tips to help you plan and shop.

Before You Shop

- Figure out your weekly schedule and budget. Plan ahead if you know you will be eating out or making a meal for others.
- Look through your pantry, fridge, cupboards, and freezers. Make a list of the food you already have that you can use in the coming week.
- Look online and in weekly flyers to learn what foods are on sale at stores in your area. Keep an eye out for sales on specialty products like organic meats and dairy that you can use during the week or freeze for later use.
- Plan all of your meals for the week, using the information listed previously as a starting point. Look for recipes that utilize ingredients you already have on hand or ingredients you know are on sale.
- Make a grocery list with any additional ingredients you will need for the recipes you've chosen. Be sure to include food for breakfasts and lunches, plus any used pantry ingredients you need to replace.
- If you receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), make sure your grocery store or farmers market accepts benefits. Some will match your dollars spent on produce up to \$10, allowing you to buy twice as much.
- Consult the Environmental Working Group's [Clean 15™](#) and [Dirty Dozen™](#) lists. Use these lists to prioritize which foods you will buy organic vs. conventional. Clean 15 foods have little pesticide residue when raised conventionally and are safe to consume. Dirty Dozen foods have the most pesticide residue when raised conventionally, so they should be purchased organic when possible.
- Have a snack. Going to the grocery store while you're hungry makes impulse purchases more likely.

In the Store

- When buying shelf-stable goods, check the bottom shelves for less expensive options. Stores tend to stock more expensive items at eye level.

- Avoid packaged and processed foods when possible. Premium packaging often contributes to the higher cost of these items.
- Buy fruits and vegetables while they are in season. Seasonal produce is usually more flavorful and less expensive. In-season produce is often priced to sell before it goes bad.
- Buy frozen produce as an alternative to fresh. Produce is frozen at the height of freshness, and most of the nutrient content remains intact. When possible, stock up on frozen produce and save it for when money is tighter.
- Buy in bulk. Spices and dry goods (rice, beans, grains, nuts, flours, etc.) are significantly cheaper in the bulk section. You can buy as much or as little as you need, depending on your storage space and budget.
- Skip the interior aisles stocked with chips, snacks, candy, and soda. Instead, do most of your shopping on the perimeter of the store, where produce, meats, and dairy products are located.
- Only buy foods that are on your grocery list.
- Buy generic or store brand items when possible.

