

Live Well, Work Well

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Healthy Meals on a Budget

Eating healthy on a limited budget may seem impossible, but with a little time, planning and strategic shopping, you can eat healthier and stay within your means.

Importance of Planning

Planning your meals for the week is the best place to start. Planning will help you make sure you are including foods from each food group—pay special attention to serving enough fruits and vegetables in family meals. Planning ahead helps you achieve a healthy balance—for instance, if you plan to serve a food higher in fat or salt, you can plan low-fat or low-salt foods to go with it.

In addition, planning saves time and money. Making a shopping list helps you know what food you already have, and what food you need—and helps avoid pricey “impulse” buys. Plus, planning your meals means fewer trips to the grocery store and helps you make use of leftover food and ingredients.

Planning Tips

Following these planning tips to make sure you are getting the most out of your money:

- Build the main part of your meal around rice, noodles or other grains. Use smaller amounts of meat, poultry and fish.
- Add variety to family favorites and try new, low-cost recipes. There are many online resources for finding healthy recipes.
- Try new ways to cook foods, such as a slow cooker or crock-pot, to make meals easier to prepare.
- Make use of leftovers to save time and money. For instance, if you make a pot roast, serve half of it and freeze the rest to use later in a casserole.
- When time allows, cook large batches of certain meals and freeze family-size portions for meals later in the month.

Tips for Shopping

Use the tips below to help you grocery shop on a budget:

- After planning your meals, make a list of all the foods you need (don't forget to check the kitchen first!)
- Look for coupons in the local newspaper or online for the foods you plan to buy.
- Avoid convenience foods (baked goods, frozen meals, etc.); you can usually make these at home much cheaper and can control the nutritional value as well.
- Try generic, store brands. They usually cost less, taste just as good and have the same nutritional value.
- When buying produce, buy what is in season. Compare fresh, frozen and canned to see which is cheapest.