

Eating Healthy on a Budget

The economy is struggling. Obesity is on the rise. Money is tight and time may even be tighter. Often, making that quick trip by our favorite fast food restaurant or dialing up the pizza place seems like the best and only option. But did you know that cooking healthy meals at home while on a tight budget is possible?

Not only is healthy cooking on a budget possible and time efficient, but it is also good for your overall health, your weight and your family. Studies have repeatedly shown the tremendous benefits of family meal times. Some benefits include an increased intake of fruits and vegetables¹. Some studies have also shown that frequent family meals can result in a decreased chance of eating disorder and overweight development^{2,3} as well as a decreased chance in tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use in adolescent girls⁴. The Expert Committee on the Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment of Child and Adolescent Overweight and Obesity recommends family meals on most, if not all days of the week as part of the treatment and prevention of childhood obesity⁵. One study suggested that family meals can enhance family cohesion, problem and emotion coping skills, and can improve stress and disordered eating related attitudes and behaviors⁶.

Here are a few tips and tricks to get you started making inexpensive, healthy meals at home:

PLAN: Planning takes a little time up front, but in the long run it can save time and money.

- Plan your family's food budget each month.
 - We budget for house and car payments as well as utilities, why not budget for food.
- Plan when, where, and how frequently you plan to go out to eat. Include this in your food budget for the month.
- Plan a week's worth of meals and snacks.
 - Knowing what you are going to eat after a long, hard day eliminates the need for decision making. This can help reduce the temptation to order in, go out to eat, or go through the drive thru. Remember when you prepare foods yourself, you control what goes into your food. You can control calories, fat, and sodium.
 - Using tools such as www.mypyramid.gov can give you an idea of how much your family needs per week.
- Plan your milk consumption.
 - Studies have shown that increasing the amount of low fat or fat free milk you drink can decrease the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, some types of cardiovascular disease, and decreases your risk of obesity^{7,8}.

- Replacing your intake of sugar-sweetened beverages (cola, sports drinks etc.) with milk may be beneficial in the development of children's lean bodymass⁹.
- Plan the use of fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - Since these products have a short shelf life, plan when you intend to use them. Having the fresh produce during the first days of the menu will make sure you use them. This will reduce the amount of waste. Supplement the meals later in the week with frozen or canned vegetables.
- After planning your meals for the week, check to see what you have on hand to avoid over buying.
 - Be sure to look in the freezer as well as the cabinets for food that you have at home.
- Plan what you are going to do with leftovers.
 - For example: Can it be lunch the next day or frozen and kept for dinner the following week?
 - Freezing leftovers is a great way to get two or three meals out of one.

GO SURFING:

- Surf the internet or check the newspaper for coupons.
 - Most supermarkets post weekly coupons and sales on their websites.
 - If a supermarket is having a great sale (ie: buy one get one free) on a more expensive item that you frequently use, consider buying it and freezing the extra.
 - Most foods, especially meats, freeze well.
 - <http://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheets/HGIC3522.htm>, The Clemson Extension, has information on storage guidelines.
- There are many coupon websites available.
 - Some of these coupons are from manufacturers and can be coupled with store sales.

BEFORE GOING TO THE STORE:

- Pick a time to shop when you are not in a rush.
 - This will allow you to have time to compare prices.
- Do not go when you are hungry
 - This will allow you to shop from your list rather than your stomach.
- If able, try to shop without children
 - If they go with you, assign them foods to select. Young children can help pick out the fruits and vegetables. If the children can read, let them help pick cereal that stays within a designated amount of sugar. A good goal to aim for when picking out cereal is 9 grams or less of sugar per serving.
- Make sure you have your list and coupons.
 - If you make your list according to the rows in the grocery store, you will be able to get in and out faster. This means less time for temptations and sticking to your list is easier.
- Try to take your food budget in cash to the store. Leave credit cards and debit cards at home.
 - This will prevent you from spending more than your budget.

AT THE STORE:

- Stick to the list.
 - Extras, even if they are inexpensive, can add up.
- Do not go up and down every aisle.
 - This will decrease your temptation to deviate from the list.
- Compare prices of generic and name brand items.
- Try to avoid buying items that are individually packaged.
 - These items are typically more expensive. Try buying the larger packages and portion sizing them out in zip sandwich bags once at home.
- Check the ‘use by’ and ‘sell by’ dates on all products.
- Once you check out, double check the receipt to make sure nothing was scanned twice and that all discounts were applied.

AT HOME:

- Quickly and properly store cold and frozen foods.

IF ELIGIBLE, FIND HELP

- Apply for an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card from your local Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which was formally known as the Food Stamps Program.
 - In the phone book look under the U.S. Government pages in the phone book. The listing should be under either the Social Services Department or Human Services Department.
- Consider enrolling your child in the free or reduced school lunch program.
- Enroll in Women, Infants, and Children program.
 - This is a program that provides supplemental foods for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and their children until age 5.
- Enroll preschool aged children in the Head Start program.
- Visit your local food bank.

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0757/HE-0757.pdf>
- <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/pubs/PDF/FDNS-NE-501.pdf>
- http://snap.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=15&tax_level=4&tax_subject=261&topic_id=1243&level3_id=6213&level4_id=10046

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