

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics



Eating Right on a Budget

Getting the most nutrition for your food budget starts with a little extra planning before you shop. There are many ways to save money on the foods that you eat. Here are some budget-friendly tips for eating right.

Cook more, eat out less

Eating out can be expensive. Many foods can be prepared for less money (and more healthfully) at home. Pre-packaged foods, like frozen dinners and packaged pasta or rice mixes can also add up when you calculate the cost per serving. Find a few simple, healthy recipes your family enjoys and save eating out for special occasions.

Plan what you're going to eat

Deciding on meals and snacks before you shop can save both time and money. Review recipes and make a grocery list of what ingredients are needed, then check to see what foods you already have and make a list for what you still need to buy. When shopping with a list you will be less likely to buy things that are not on it.

Decide how much to make or buy

Making a large batch by doubling a recipe will save time in the kitchen later on. Extra portions can be used for lunches or meals later in the week, or frozen as leftovers in individual containers for future use. Plus, purchasing ingredients in bulk is often cheaper.

Determine where to shop

Check the local newspaper and online or at the store for sales and coupons, especially when it comes to more expensive ingredients, such as meat and seafood. While at the store, compare prices of different brands and different sizes of the same brand to see which has a lower unit price. The unit price is usually located on the shelf directly below the product.



Shop for foods that are in season

Fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season are usually easier to get and may be less expensive. Frozen and canned produce are also good options and may be more affordable at certain times of the year. Look for fruit that is canned in 100% juice or water and canned vegetables that are labeled "low in sodium" or "no salt added".

Watch portion sizes

Eating too much of even lower cost foods and beverages can add up to extra dollars and calories. Use smaller plates, bowls and glasses to help keep portions under control. Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables and the other half with grains and protein foods such as lean meat, poultry, seafood or beans. This is an easy way to eat a balanced meal while controlling portions and cost. To complete the meal, add a glass of fat-free or low-fat milk or a serving of fat-free yogurt for dessert.

Focus on nutritious, low-cost foods

Certain foods tend to be less expensive than others. Make the most of your food dollars by finding recipes that use the following ingredients: beans, peas, and lentils; sweet or white potatoes; eggs; peanut butter; canned salmon, tuna or crabmeat; grains such as oats, brown rice, barley or quinoa; and frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.

Make your own healthy snacks

Convenience costs money. Many snacks, even healthy ones, usually cost more when sold individually. Make your own snacks by purchasing large tubs of low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese and dividing them into smaller containers. For trail mix, combine unsalted nuts, dried fruit and whole grain pretzels or cereal; store small portions in airtight containers. Air-popped popcorn and whole fresh fruits in season also tend to cost less compared to pre-packaged items.

Start a garden or visit a Farmers Market

A garden can be a lot of fun, especially for kids. It's also an affordable way to eat more fruits and vegetables. Plants can be started from seed or purchased at a low price.

Another way to increase your family's variety of produce is to visit a farmers market. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are often available for less money than at the grocery store. Check and see where the closest farmers market is in your area.

Quench your thirst with water

Water from the tap is a low cost way to stay hydrated. Substituting plain water in place of sweetened beverages not only saves you money but may also help you reduce extra calories from added sugars.

To find a registered dietitian nutritionist in your area and get additional food and nutrition information, visit eatright.org



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

This tip sheet is provided by:

Authored by Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics staff registered dietitian nutritionists.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and Complete Food and Nutrition Guide, 5th edition
©Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Reproduction of this tip sheet is permitted for educational purposes. Reproduction for sales purposes is not authorized.