

Healthy Shopping on a Budget

With a little know-how and advance planning, you can enjoy nutritious foods while sticking to a tight budget.

Plan Grocery Shopping Around Sales: The key to budget-friendly grocery shopping is planning ahead. Plan meals around fresh produce, lean protein foods and low-fat dairy items that are on sale/in season to save money while eating healthy. Check store sale flyers and available coupons for additional savings. Compare national brands and private store labels for the lowest price. Use the unit price to compare cost between different sized packages of the same product.

Create a Shopping List: Use your weekly eating plan to create a master grocery list and stick to it. Prioritize your food dollars for nutrient-rich vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy, lean protein foods and whole grains. To keep your grocery list from growing too long, prepare meals that include similar ingredients throughout the week.

Shopping the Produce Section: When it comes to fresh vegetables and fruits, shop seasonally. Local, seasonal produce is at its peak flavor and is generally more abundant, so it's usually sold at a lower price.

Look for Frozen or Canned Alternatives: If the produce item you want isn't in season or doesn't fit in your budget, consider purchasing it frozen or canned. Fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables can be good for you. Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are picked at peak freshness and can be just as nutritious as fresh foods because canning and freezing preserves many nutrients. Canned and frozen foods offer an alternative to fresh and may be more budget friendly. Be sure to check the ingredients list to avoid items with added sugars or salt.

Budget Shopping at the Meat Counter: Consider purchasing a larger quantity of meat that is on sale and preparing enough for two or more meals. Enjoy leftovers later in the week or freeze for future use. Because meat is often the highest dollar ingredient in a recipe, consider planning meatless meals a few nights each week, or try replacing half the meat in dishes such as chili, meatloaf or burger patties with beans, finely minced mushrooms, or chopped vegetables. Incorporating more non-meat proteins, including beans, nuts and eggs, can be cost-effective and nutritious.

Buying Whole Grains and Dry Goods: Whole grains and dried beans are generally inexpensive and are an easy way to get more nutrition for your buck. Stock up on these nonperishable items when on sale or take advantage of the bulk bin by purchasing only the amount you need. Dried beans, peas and lentils are great options to keep on hand. You can buy in bulk, prepare ahead of time and then freeze so you always have protein and fiber-rich foods on hand.

Reduce Waste: Once you've done your shopping, make the most of your food spending by cutting down on waste. Plan to use highly perishable items (such as fish and seafood, salad greens, berries and fresh herbs) early in the week and save more hearty items for later in the week. Enjoy leftovers for lunch or create new meals from leftover ingredients. Cooked meat and vegetables can be revamped as a filling for a casserole, frittata, or soup.

Reference: American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org

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