



Healthy and Delicious on a Budget™ — Budget Basics

Whether you need to feed hungry teenagers or you live alone and only cook for one, when it comes to making dinner on a budget, there is much to consider. If you are interested in budgeting your money, your time, or your energy (perhaps all three) then look below to see what tricks and tips might support you along the way as you, and your family, continue to eat *Healthy and Delicious on a Budget*.™

Before Shopping...

Plan your meals for the next couple of days, the week, or the month:

- *Why meal planning?* Meal planning can help you save money and spend less for a number of reasons. First, eating out is most often more expensive than home cooked meals. Second, a meal plan can help avoid the financial pit-falls of impulse buying.
 - Refer to *HDOB Menu Planner & the Worksheet for Planning Your Ideal Meal*.
- *Assess your schedule:* Look at your schedule for the week and identify when you will have time to cook. When you know how much time you have to prepare food, you can identify what meals to prepare.
- *Listen to your body:* Listen to what your body craves and focus on the healthiest versions of those foods. You might crave Indian spices, Italian seasonings, a hearty stew, or chicken soup. Aligning your meals with what you crave will encourage you to stick to your plan. It is important to look forward to the meals you've planned. Cravings can also be used as a tool to improve your creativity with healthy meal planning.
 - Refer to *Building Your Ideal Meal & Ideas for Food Quantity & Building a Healthy Meal - The Basics*.
- *Start with what you know:* What foods do you already know how to cook? Start with what you know and expand from there.
- *Try something new:* Find new recipes to try. Experiment with new foods, and increase the variety of foods in your diet. Have fun!
 - Refer to *Weekly Meal Plan with Recipes & Vegetables-Adding More*.
- *Get the family involved:* If you have finicky eaters in your home (kids, teens...), get them involved in the menu planning process. Others are more likely (kids especially!) to eat what is being served if they have some input.

Create a shopping list:

- *Use your meal plan:* Make your shopping list from your meal plan. Shopping from a list reduces impulse buying. A shopping list will help you stick to your budget and buy only what is needed for the meals you've planned.
 - Refer to *HDOB Shopping List*
- *Look for coupons and sales:* Look for the Natural Grocers by Vitamin Cottage *Health Hotline*® publication for sales. Utilizing sales items in your meal plan will definitely help you spend less. Whenever possible, stock up on sale items.
 - Refer to *Natural Grocers Health Hotline*® (*sign-up online at www.naturalgrocers.com*).
 - Refer to www.mambosprouts.com/coupons

Eat before you shop:

- *Be satiated:* If you are hungry while you shop, you might be tempted to buy things that are not on your shopping list.

While Shopping...

Vegetables and Fruit:

- *Buy seasonally:* Although most fresh vegetables and fruits are available year-round, seasonal produce is often less expensive, not to mention seasonal produce often tastes better.
- *Check the freezer section:* Frozen vegetables and fruits are pre-washed and usually flash frozen within hours of being picked, which locks in the majority of nutrients. Easy, fast, and nutrient dense!
- *Try something new:* Is there a vegetable or fruit that is new to you? Perhaps your eyes are drawn to everything that is red? Not sure what to do with celery root? Ask, and we'll point you in the right direction.

Take advantage of in-store specials and sales:

- *Keep your eyes open:* Not all products on sale are always advertised. Look for additional in-store sales and promotions. Additionally, buy extra of products that you will use when they are on sale. This can save you money in the long run.

Comparison shop:

- *Prices can vary:* Different brands of the same product are often of equal quality, but their prices can often vary; loose produce will often cost less than pre-packaged.

Bring help along:

- *Bring the kids, seriously!:* It's never too early to introduce kids to the menu planning and shopping process. Kids don't eat vegetables? Have them pick a fruit or vegetable for the family to eat. You might be surprised at how quickly their tastes change.

After Shopping...

Vegetables and Fruit:

- *Decrease waste:* Store your fresh produce immediately once you get home. This will extend the life of your produce.
- *Use as ready made snacks:* Chop vegetables and keep in a sealed container or in a ziploc bag for handy and healthy snack options. Have fruit washed and ready to eat.
- *Make soup:* Perhaps you have vegetables left in the produce bin, or you didn't end up using the vegetables as you had planned for the week? Homemade soup can be a healthy and delicious way to use vegetables (and fruit!). Freeze the leftovers. Try butternut squash and apple, or chicken soup with mushrooms, onion, carrots, and rice.

Plan and Prepare Ahead:

- *Eat in rather than eating out:* Eating out costs money, and contrary to what many people may think it can cost you time and energy too. By planning ahead, you will always have balanced and nourishing foods readily available.
- *Put leftovers into single serving size to go containers:* Looking for a breakfast, lunch, or dinner solution for the next day or later in the week? Transfer leftovers into single serving size containers.
- *Make extra and freeze:* Make larger quantities and freeze portions for future meals. You can freeze family-size portions for a quick meal the following week, or mini portions to take for lunch. If freezing, remember to label and date so you know what you're eating!
- *Transform leftovers:* Transform your leftovers into something tasty (*ie.* last night's roast chicken can make a tasty chicken and rice soup).