

TIPS FOR HEALTHY, THRIFTY MEALS

WHY PLAN MEALS?

To help you & your family be healthier. When you plan meals, you can make sure you include enough foods from each food group, particularly vegetables & fruits.

To help you balance meals. When you are serving a food with a lot of fat or salt, you can plan lowfat or low-salt foods to go with it. For example, ham is high in salt. If you have ham for dinner, you also can serve a salad or a vegetable that doesn't need salt.

To save money. If you plan before you go food shopping, you will know what you have on hand & what you need. Also, shopping from a list helps you avoid expensive "impulse" purchases.

To save time & effort. When you plan meals, you have foods on hand & make fewer trips to the grocery store. Planning also helps you make good use of leftovers, which can reduce cooking time & food costs.



TIPS FOR PLANNING

Build the main part of your meal around rice, noodles or other grains. Use small amounts of meat, poultry, fish or eggs. For example, make a casserole by mixing rice, vegetables & chicken.

Add variety to family meals. In addition to cooking family favorites, try new, low-cost recipes or food combinations. If you usually serve mashed potatoes, try baked potatoes or potato salad.

Make meals easier to prepare by trying new ways to cook foods. For example, try using a slow cooker or crock-pot to cook stews or soups. They cook foods without constant watching.

Do "batch cooking" & use planned leftovers to save both time & money. For example, cook a large batch of baked meatballs or turkey chili, divide it into family-size portions & freeze some for meals later. Or prepare a beef pot roast, serve half of it & freeze the remaining half to use later.

Plan snacks that give your family the nutrients they need. For example, buy fresh fruits when in season, dried fruits like raisins or prunes, raw vegetables, crackers, & whole wheat bread.

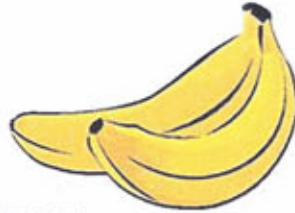


TIPS FOR SHOPPING

Before you go shopping: Make a list of all the foods you need while in your kitchen so you can check what you have on hand. Look for specials & coupons in the newspaper ads. But remember, coupons save money only if you need the product. Check what brands are on sale, they may cost less than the one with a coupon.

While you shop: When your food budget allows, buy extra lowcost, nutritious foods like potatoes & frozen orange juice concentrate that keep well. Compare the cost of convenience foods with foods made from scratch. "Convenience foods" include baked goods, frozen meals & vegetables with sauces. Many of these foods can be prepared at home with less fat, sugar & salt for less money. Try store brands, they usually cost less, but they taste as good & have the same nutritional value. Take time to compare fresh, frozen & canned foods to see which is cheapest. Buy what's on special & what's in season. Prevent food waste & buy only the amount that your family will eat before the food spoils.

Using label & shelf information: Read the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods. Compare the amount of fat, sodium & calories in similar products. This can also help you choose foods with more vitamins, minerals & fiber. Use date information on packages—"sell by" & "best if used by" dates—to help you choose the freshest foods. Look for the unit price to compare similar foods. It tells you the cost per ounce, pound, or pint, so you'll know which item is the best buy. Most stores show the unit price on a shelf sticker just below the product.



SOME BEST BUYS FOR COST & NUTRITION

BREADS & GRAINS Look for bargains on day-old bread & bakery products. Buy regular rice, oatmeal & grits instead of the instant & flavored types. Try whole-grain bread & brown rice to add nutrients & variety to family meals.

VEGETABLES & SALADS Look for large bags of frozen vegetables. They may be bargains & you can cook just the amount you need. Foods at salad bars can be costly—buy these items in the produce section of the store. But if you need only a small amount of a vegetable, buying at the salad bar can save money if it reduces the amount you waste.

FRUITS Buy fresh fruits in season, when they generally cost less.

MILK Nonfat dry milk is the least expensive way to buy milk. When using it as a beverage, mix it several hours ahead & refrigerate so it can get cold before drinking. Buy fresh milk in large containers (gallon or 1/2 gallon). These generally cost less than quarts. Buy fat-free or lowfat milk to cut the amount of fat in your family's meals. Note that children under 2 years of age should be given only whole milk.

MEAT & POULTRY Look for specials at the meat counter. Buying cuts of meat on sale can mean big savings for you. Buy chuck or bottom round roast instead of sirloin. These cuts have less fat & cost less. They need to be covered during cooking & cooked longer to make the meat tender. Buy whole chickens & cut them into serving size pieces yourself.

DRY BEANS & PEAS Use these sometimes instead of meat, poultry, or fish. They cost less & provide many of the same nutrients. They are also lower in fat.

BULK FOODS Buy bulk foods when they are available. They can be lower in price than similar foods sold in packages. Also, you can buy just the amount you need.



TIPS FOR HEALTHY COOKING

- Go easy on fat, sugar, & salt in preparing foods. For example, make baked chicken instead of fried chicken or baked cod instead of fried fish. You don't have to leave out all the fat, sugar, or salt—just limit the amount you use.
- Flavor foods with herbs, spices, & other lowfat seasonings instead of using rich sauces & gravy.
- Make homemade desserts to save money & serve additional healthy foods to the family. For example, try a fruit crisp, instead of serving cake or ice-cream.
- Remove skin from poultry before cooking to lower the fat content.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NUTRITION

Contact USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy & Promotion. The address is:

U.S. Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy & Promotion

1120 20th Street, N.W. Suite 200, North Lobby Washington, DC 20036-3406

Some nutrition materials, including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans & the Food Guide Pyramid booklet may be accessed through the CNPP website at www.usda.gov/cnpp