

Eating Well On a Budget

Eat delicious, healthy food and save money! Follow these great tips to make the most of limited food dollars.



Plan ahead

- Plan meals a few days or weeks ahead and then write out a grocery list. Follow your shopping list and you won't miss items or make last minute changes. You won't need to make extra shopping trips, which can cost you time, gas and money.
- Plan your menus around sale items and grain products, vegetables and fruit that are in season. Remember to save leftovers for lunches and suppers.
- Go shopping when you are well rested and full. It's been proven that people who shop on an empty stomach spend more money.
- Leave your children or others at home if they are likely to add unplanned foods or expensive items to the cart.
- Some stores offer 10 to 20% off your total bill just for shopping on certain days of the week! Take advantage of these special events.

In the store

- Shop around the edges of the store first. This is where you can usually find the basics: vegetables and fruit, milk products, grain products and meats.
- If the food item on special is not there, ask for a "rain check." A "rain check" allows you to pick the item up at a later date for the special price.
- Use the stoop and rise method. Items at eye level may be more expensive than items on the lower and upper shelves.
- Unit pricing helps you to compare similar items of different sizes or brands. The price per ounce, gram or litre shows the best buy.
- Buy the freshest possible. Check the Best Before Date to make sure that food won't spoil before you can eat it.
- Watch the cash register screen as your food items scan through. Sometimes mistakes can be made.
- You've probably seen words such as "Canada Choice" or "Canada Grade A" on some foods. All food grades are equally nutritious. Often the less expensive grades will suit your needs.
- Buying in bulk saves packaging costs and can cost less. Save money on all your basic foods such as pasta, potatoes, rice, flour, oatmeal, dried fruit, nuts, seeds and beans by buying in bulk. Consider dividing bulk foods with a friend.

Buy what's on sale

- Clip coupons and use them – but only for products you really need. Even with coupons there may still be a cheaper brand.
- Compare prices between name brands and store brands. You will get the same quality for a lower price.

- Does it pay to shop around? Yes, if the stores are close together but don't waste time, energy and gas driving from store to store.

Choose convenience foods carefully

- Convenience foods can be expensive. Foods like canned soups and stews, frozen dinners and packaged noodle and rice mixes are often costly.
- If you want to save money, you may want to spend more of your time preparing meals. But if your time or cooking skills are limited, you may be willing to pay more to add some convenience foods to your grocery cart.
- Snack foods are some of the most expensive foods in the store. Replace some of your snack foods with whole grain breads. This will help increase your fiber intake, and it will also cut food costs and fat in your diet. Instead of potato chips, turn leftover whole wheat pitas into pita chips by brushing them with oil then sprinkling them with a seasoning, cutting them into wedges and baking them for 10 minutes. You can also snack on stovetop or in the oven at 350 air-popped popcorn.

Top-quality food for half the cost

- Ask grocery store staff about less-than-perfect fruit for sale, such as bananas or apples. Some bakeries sell day old bread and baked goods at a lower price.
- Dark-meat chicken parts, frozen whole chickens, ground turkey and ground beef are usually cheap year-round in Canada.
- Check with the deli clerk about buying "ends" of deli meat rolls at lower prices. Also ask the meat manager if they sell about-to-expire cuts for half price. Freeze the meat if you won't be able to use it by the expiration date.
- Buy whole chickens and roast them slowly in a covered casserole dish with C). The meat will fall off the bone after 3 hours (135° water in the oven at 275° eight hours. This will give you boneless chicken breasts, plenty of meat for two or three other meals and chicken bones for broth.
- Find out if discounted meat is put out for sale at a certain time or day.
- Use less tender cuts of meat, such as round, sirloin or flank in moist stews or sauces to make them more tender. Fill a crockpot or slow cooker with meat and vegetables, let it cook all day and come home to an easy and delicious supper.
- Keep meat portions smaller (about the size of a deck of cards) to save money.
- Peanut butter, tofu, lentils, split peas, kidney beans or other dried beans are good sources of protein and are usually less expensive than meat. For some ideas on how to use these foods, check a recipe book or ask your dietitian.

Quantity cooking

Busy people need to save every bit of time and money available to them. The next time it's 5:30 pm and you're dreading the dilemma of the dinner hour, resolve to try one of these ideas.

- Double or Triple – When making dishes like lasagna, soup, spaghetti sauce or casseroles, double or triple the recipe and freeze the extra portions for future meals.

- Once-a-month cooking – Cook a month’s worth of meals over the first weekend of every month. This will take a lot of planning and cooking but in the end, you’ll save on time and money.

Storing Food

- Spoiled food wastes money, so learn how to store your food safely.
- Buy smaller amounts of foods that spoil quickly, like fresh vegetables.
- Check “best before” or “expiration” dates. Only buy the food if you can use or freeze it before the date.

Grain Products

- Store bread in a closed plastic bag on the counter or cupboard.
- Freeze bread for up to 4 months. Wrap it tightly in a plastic bag.
- Store grains or pasta in a tightly sealed jar or tin. Glass jars are very good for storing grains and pasta.
- Whole grain flours do not keep as well as white flour. They will stay fresh in a cool, dry place for up to 3 months. To keep them longer, put them in the freezer in sealed containers.
- Keep egg noodles for only 6 months.

Vegetables and Fruit

- Vegetables will keep for a week in the fridge. Do not wash fruit before you store it. For the longest shelf life, store in plastic bags with holes.
- Store vegetables and fruit whole and unwashed for the longest shelf life. Wash and cut them up when you want to use them.
- Keep winter squash, potatoes, onions and garlic in paper or net bags in a cool, dry, dark place.
- Keep mushrooms in a paper bag in the fridge. Do not wash them until you use them.
- Wrap lettuce in a paper towel. It will keep for at least a week in the refrigerator.
- Apples will keep for 6 weeks in the fridge. Keep them in a plastic bag with holes in it.
- Berries will keep for as long as two weeks in the fridge. Put them on a plate covered with a paper towel and plastic wrap. Berries will keep in the freezer for a year.
- Grapes keep for about a week in the fridge. Frozen grapes are a great snack food!
- Bananas ripen best on the counter out of the direct sun. Ripe bananas will keep about 2 days on the counter, or as long as 2 weeks in the fridge. Bananas are still good to eat after the skin has turned dark. Freeze ‘black’ bananas whole for making banana bread or muffins.
- Melons keep for 2 to 4 days on the counter. Keep ripe or cut melon in the fridge.

Milk Products

- Put milk in the fridge right away. Store it on a shelf, not in the door. The shelf area is colder.
- Freeze milk for up to three weeks. Let it thaw in the fridge and use in recipes.
- Keep powdered milk in a tightly closed container. Keep it in a cool, dry place. Use within 2 months.

- Wrap cheese in aluminum foil, waxed paper or plastic wrap. The harder the cheese, the longer it will keep. Cheddar, mozzarella and other hard cheese can be frozen even though the texture will be more crumbly. Use frozen cheese for pizza or casseroles.

Meat and Alternatives

- Fresh meat will keep in the fridge for 3 days after the packaging date.
- If you want to keep meat longer, wrap it tightly in plastic wrap or in a freezer bag and freeze it. It will keep this way for up to a year.
- Put poultry and fish in the fridge as soon as you bring them home. Do not let them sit out for more than 30 minutes.
- Cook poultry and fish within 2 days. If you are not going to use it right away, put it in the freezer.
- Store dried beans, peas and lentils in glass or plastic jars with tight lids. They will keep safely for 1 year.
- Keep cooked beans, peas and lentils in the fridge or store in the freezer to use another day.
- Store eggs in the carton on a fridge shelf. They will remain fresh longer and you will always be able to check the 'best before' date.

Food safety issues

- Remember, "discount" items must be eaten soon or put in the freezer.
- Never buy dented, crushed or bulging cans of food.
- Throw out cheese, sour cream or yogurt that has mould on it.
- Never leave eggs at room temperature for more than 2 hours. They may not be safe to eat.
- Do not buy or eat cracked eggs.