

Eat Right When Money's Tight!

By

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With our tight economy, many families are concerned about the rising costs of food. If you are struggling with your food budget, read on for tips on how to stretch your food dollars through budgeting, planning, and shopping.

First of all, **know how much money you have available for food** with these ideas:

- Know the resources you have to spend on food.
- Make a shopping list based on the resources you have to spend.
- Buy only the amounts of fresh foods you can use before they spoil.
- Consider frozen or shelf stable items that last longer.

Secondly, before you go to the grocery store, **check what foods you already have on hand**. Once you know what foods you have, ask these questions:

- What meals and recipes can I make using the foods I have?
- Can I mix foods together to make a tasty and nutritious meal?
- What foods does my family need for good health?

Then:

- Plan what recipes you will make using your list of foods.
- Use other foods on your list such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains to complete the menu.
- Once you plan your menus, make a new list for missing foods you need to buy.

Thirdly, remember these **tips before, during, and after shopping**:

- Make a shopping list. This helps you stick to your budget.
- Plan your meals because planning helps put leftovers to good use.
- Look for coupons, sales and store specials.
- For added savings sign up for the store discount card where available.
- Don't shop when you are hungry. It is easier to stick to your shopping list.
- Try store brands. They usually cost less.
- Compare products for the best deal.
- Check sell by dates. Buy the freshest food possible. It lasts longer.
- Store food right away to preserve freshness.
- Freeze food to prevent spoiling.

- Divide foods into small portions for children and elderly to prevent waste.
- Use foods with the earliest expiration dates first. And finally, remember these **tips for the best buys for cost and nutrition**:
- Look for bargains on day old bread. It costs less but is still nutritious.
- Buy regular rice, oatmeal and grits instead of instant to save on money, sugar and calories.
- Buy large bags of frozen vegetables. Seal tightly in the freezer between uses.
- Avoid pre-bagged salad mixes. They are usually more expensive and spoil faster.
- Buy fresh fruits in season when they generally cost less.
- Frozen and canned fruits are a smart choice all year round.
- Buy fresh milk in the largest size that can be used before spoiling. Larger containers cost less than smaller sizes.
- Ultra-pasteurized milk has a longer expiration date and won't spoil as fast.
- Chuck or bottom round roast has less fat and is cheaper than sirloin.
- Dried beans and peas are a good source of protein and fiber. They last a long time without spoiling.
- Look for specials at the meat counter. Buy meat on sale for big savings.
- Buy meat in large bulk packages to save money. Freeze portions you might not use right away to prevent spoiling.

Hopefully, these suggestions will serve to help you as you work toward managing your food budget during these tough economic times. If you have recently experienced job loss or a financial crisis, and need assistance with purchasing food, the USDA offers fifteen (15) different nutrition assistance programs to help American households that are struggling to balance their budgets. For more information call 1-800-221-5689, or visit the website www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm. The Hardee Help Center is also available to help local individuals and families in Hardee County with temporary and immediate food needs. They can be reached by calling 863-773-0034 for more information, or by visiting their location at 131 North 8th Avenue in Wauchula.