

## A healthy, well-fed and active body on a budget

A healthy diet is based on starchy foods (rice, pasta, etc.) with plenty of fruit and vegetables, some protein-rich foods (meat, fish and lentils) and a little milk and dairy (and not too much fat, salt or sugar) will give you all the nutrients that you need. Research advises us that a healthy well balanced diet can reduce mortality as well as the risk of contracting illnesses, including coronary heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Unfortunately, one of the main hinderants to healthy eating is the cost of good quality food. Most of us are trying to save money any way we can and as living on a budget becomes more important, it is helpful to look at how to stretch your food allowance and still eat a healthy, tasty diet. Fortunately, there are many creative ways to do this.

Make a grocery list and stick to it while shopping. Before going out, critically evaluate your list, what do you spend your money on and which items are unnecessary. Some specific ways to do this:

- **Cut out junk:** Evaluate how much money you are spending on items such as soda (regular or diet), cookies, chocolates, prepackaged meals, processed foods, etc. Limit or completely cut out these unhealthy foods.
- **Eat out less:** Even just reducing your meals out by 1 or 2 times per week can save you money.
- **Shop the fresh produce section of the store first:** This way you will fill your cart with healthy whole foods like fresh produce and meat, leaving less room for the "junk food fillers" and thus saving money.
- **Cook large portions ahead:** It saves time to cook once and eat multiple times. One idea is to make a big pot of soup or pasta sauce and freezing the extras. When you don't feel like cooking, help yourself to a hearty bowlful of soup or a pasta dish along with a green salad. This makes a nutritious but inexpensive lunch or dinner anytime.

### Step 2:

Think about the quality of foods you purchase- how have they been raised or grown, what impact will these foods have on your health, the environment and your shopping bill. Organically grown food reduces the potential health and environmental hazards posed by pesticides, GMOs, irradiation and additives. An investment in your food now, could save you money on health bills later.

When purchasing high quality, organic foods consider:

- **For the foods you eat the most- purchase only the highest quality produce.** This way you reduce your exposure to things such as pesticides, herbicides, and antibiotics, while increasing the nutritional value of your food. Purchase organic foods which are in season and are locally sourced as they are tastier, cheaper and have higher levels of antioxidants and various vitamins and minerals such as: vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, and iron.

Check store circulars and newsletters for coupons. Some retailers even provide coupon printouts from the register when you are checking out

- **Prioritise.** The ten most necessary organic products which you should be spending on in order of importance are: milk, potatoes, peanut

butter, baby food, ketchup, cotton, apples, beef, soy and corn. Use the Internet to find out which foods have the highest concentrations of pesticides.

- **Buy in Bulk or start a buying club:** start a club with 2 or 3 other families, buy in bulk directly from wholesalers, divide the purchases and save money at the same time. Purchase organic dried goods and pantry staples like flour and lentils in larger quantities to cut costs.

Step 3:

Consider the following tips for individual items:

**Fruits and Veggies:** In the produce section take advantage of the on-sale items like berries, peaches, nectarines, corn, green beans and other seasonal products. Freshly picked fruits offer the best of their vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, which can be frozen and used later in the year for yogurt, ice cream or cereal. Frozen veggies are seen to have as much nutritional value as fresh vegetables.

**Proteins:** Protein comes in many inexpensive forms. Eggs are very versatile and an excellent source of protein and now can be found with omega-3 fatty acids, folate and Vitamin B.

Beans are inexpensive and are high in protein and fiber. Canned beans are easy to use in soups, over salads or added to rice or other starchy dishes. Cheese and yoghurt are two other forms of inexpensive protein that can be used anytime of the day. A larger tub of yoghurt is cheaper and goes a longer way instead of several smaller tubs.

Cheese can be purchased in larger quantities (larger size, the cheaper the price). You can grate or divide extra cheese into portions and freeze extras for later on.

Meat is everyone's favorite part of the meal, purchase high quality cuts of meat and practice portion control. Not only do you save money on the cut of meat, but you can also stretch the meat for more meals when you make tasty dishes such as casseroles, sauces, soups, stews, and stir-fries. It is easy to add extra vegetables, beans and whole grains to create delicious, hearty, and filling meals.

**Whole Grains:** Whole grains are a must in every household, whole wheat breads and rolls, brown rice, quinoa, pasta all provide essential vitamins and minerals. The best advice for buying breads and rolls on a budget is to freeze the extra, as bread can be safely frozen until ready to use. Be careful for freezer burn as once its freezer burnt you may have to throw it away and food thrown away is money AND food wasted.

There are many ways to eat well on a budget. Go to the grocery store prepared with a list and some meal ideas for the week so you're not overwhelmed. The money you save now may be used for a family vacation, or a mom's afternoon out, or to get some "me" time- a stylish hair cut or mani and pedi. All worthy expenses!

sidebar:

Guidelines for storing foods in the freezer:

Freezing preserves food for extended periods because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause both food spoilage and foodborne illness.

Almost any food can be frozen besides canned foods or eggs in the shell.

Canned foods like beans or vegetables can be frozen after being decanned.

Freeze items as soon as possible as freshness and quality at the time of freezing affect the condition of frozen foods.

Freezer burn (grayish-brown leathery spots) does not make food unsafe, but merely dry in spots. Cut freezer-burned portions away either before or after cooking the food while heavily freezer-burned foods may have to be discarded.

Freeze food as fast as possible to maintain its quality.

Item	Months
<b>Poultry, raw</b>	9
<b>Poultry, cooked</b>	4
<b>Lunchmeats</b>	1- 2
<b>Lean fish, cooked/ uncooked</b>	4- 6
<b>Meat, uncooked (roast/ chops/ other cuts)</b>	4- 12
<b>Meat, cooked</b>	2- 3
<b>Stews &amp; soups</b>	2- 3
<b>Casseroles</b>	2- 3
<b>Vegetables (bagged &amp; unwashed)</b>	3- 6
<b>Fruit juices</b>	8
<b>Berries (unwashed &amp; vacuum packed)</b>	6
<b>Bread, all types (sealed tightly)</b>	6
<b>Rice, cooked</b>	3

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References:

Many of the tips from the three steps I have formulated according to what I do in my own house and combined that with sound nutrition information. This article stemmed from our own family, where we will be spending 4 months in the USA and food was our major expense so we needed to cut our budget so that we could save money. I do buy certain items in bulk, cook extra and freeze when I can, and it has helped to cut the budget but still eat well.

Vorster HH. South African Journal of Clinical Nutrition. South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines. Sep. 2001. Vol. 14. No. 3. Supplement, S1- S80).

Michels KB & Wolk A. International Journal Of Epidemiology. A Prospective study of variety of healthy foods and mortality in women. (2002) 31 (4): 847-854.

Food Safety Table and Frozen food Guidelines adapted from:  
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/storagetimes.html>

Food Safety Tips adapted from:  
[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/freezing-and-food-safety/CT\\_Index](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/freezing-and-food-safety/CT_Index)

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/basics/index.html>