Eating Healthy on a Budget: Shopping Tips and Menu Ideas

It is easy to eat healthy on a budget. Here are some tips to help:

Before you shop plan ahead

- Create a budget for food. Have a dollar amount in mind and stick to it.
- Plan your meals. Use cook books, friends, family or the internet to get menu ideas and recipes.
- Plan your snacks. Snack foods can shrink a food budget. Avoid soda or beverages that are not “diet”. They cost a lot and only add calories to your diet.
- Once you have a meal idea, write out a grocery list. To make shopping easy, create food categories. Write out how much money is spent on each item or food group.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Produce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>1 bag</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meats/Poultry/Fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground turkey</td>
<td>1 pound</td>
<td>$3.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is okay to change your mind based on cost or what is available when you get to the store. The key is to stick to your budget while eating healthy.

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Get organized before you shop

- Make a list of what you have in the kitchen or pantry.
- Organize your food to remember what you have. Keep similar items in the same area, such as space for canned foods, dry foods or cereals.
- Plan meals with what you have at home. You buy less and eat food before it spoils.
- Put leftovers in new meals. Add left-over vegetables to a soup, salad or casserole. Combine yogurt with fruit salad for a smoothie. This means less food waste.

Save money when you shop

- Look for in store sales or specials.
- Look for the store brand or generic brand. The same food will cost less.
- Use coupons. It can take time to cut coupons but they save money.
- Sign up for a shopping card if the store has one. This is not a credit card. It just gives you more money off the food you buy.
- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season:
  - Summer – melon, corn, tomatoes, peaches, berries
  - Autumn – pumpkins, squash, apples
  - Winter – oranges, grapefruit, apples, grapes
  - Spring – strawberries
- Eat frozen or canned fruits and vegetables when fresh ones cost more or are not in season. Frozen ones have less salt than canned. Drain and rinse canned vegetables for less salt. Buy canned fruits that are “lite” or use natural juice and not syrup.
- Dairy: Try low-fat cheese or yogurt. Drink milk with 2% or less fat. It still has Vitamin D in it. Try non-fat dry milk powder for recipes or to drink. Make it a day ahead of use for better taste. Or try ½ powder and ½ regular milk for taste. Powdered milk can go bad so be sure to check the date on the package.
• Grains (bread, cereal, rice, pasta): Eat whole wheat or whole grain bread, pasta and cereal. Eat brown rice instead of white rice. To reduce waste, freeze bread and save what you need for later. Hot cereals like oatmeal, grits, and cream of wheat can cost less and have a longer shelf life.

• Proteins (meat, poultry, dried beans, eggs, fish): Choose low fat meats and buy in the “big” package when it is on sale. Split it into several meals and put it into the freezer until needed.
  ▶ Lean cuts of beef: Top round, Top loin steak, Chuck steak
  ▶ Poultry: Choose white meat and remove skin. Turkey can cost less than chicken.
  ▶ Eggs: Use egg whites instead of the entire egg or egg beaters
  ▶ Fish: Choose canned salmon or tuna packed in water, not oil
  ▶ Beans: Beans cost less than meat and are good for you. Try baked beans, fat-free refried beans, or kidney beans. Try dry beans and soak them before cooking. These can be used with meats/poultry to make meals more substantial.

• Snacks: Avoid chips and candy. Eat fruit, a small piece of low-fat cheese, or a ¼ cup of nuts such as almonds, walnuts or peanuts. They will give you energy that last longer than other snack foods. Try animal crackers, vanilla wafers, ginger snaps, popcorn or pretzels. Make your own snack foods by taking what you already have in the house.

Menu Ideas
Here are a few healthy meals to try that keep you within your budget:

Quick Burritos
Spanish rice packet 
Fresh or canned tomatoes 
Refried beans 
Flour tortilla 
Reduced-fat shredded cheese

Make Spanish rice as indicated on the package. Add in tomatoes while cooking. Put the rice, some beans and cheese in the tortilla shell, and you have yourself a meal containing 4 of 5 food groups.
**Pasta with Broccoli and Chicken**

Dry packaged dinners such as Lipton Chicken and Noodles or Pasta Roni Fettuccine

1 chicken breast (skinless/boneless)

Fresh or frozen broccoli

Margarine

Skim milk

Make the noodles as indicated on the package. Use skim milk and use \( \frac{1}{2} \) the margarine that the box suggests. Add in thawed broccoli about 5 minutes before cooking is complete. Bake the chicken breast in the oven until done. Mix the chicken in with the pasta or eat on the side. Add a piece of fruit and glass of milk and this meal contains all five food groups.

**Tortilla Pizza**

1 flour tortilla

Pizza sauce

Reduced-fat mozzarella cheese

Favorite pizza toppings such as tomatoes, skinless grilled chicken, green peppers, onion and mushrooms

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Put pizza sauce, toppings and cheese on flour tortilla. Bake in oven for about 10 to 15 minutes. Add a side salad with reduced-fat dressing and a piece of fruit for dessert and you have a meal with 4 of the 5 food groups.

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Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.