

Healthy Eating on a Budget

A limited budget does not mean that you have to sacrifice healthy nutrition. These tips can help you bring healthy foods into your diet while being mindful of your budget.

Plan ahead

Before you shop for food, plan what you will be eating for the days ahead. Meal planning can help you waste less food. It can also help you eat out less at restaurants (which can be expensive).

Here are some ways you can start planning your meals:

- Go through your recipes and cookbooks or search online for healthy, budget-friendly meal ideas. For a helpful recipe website, go to [myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes](https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes). (This website also includes a rating of the recipe cost.)
- Look at what foods you already have in the fridge, freezer and pantry. Choose recipes that use ingredients that you already have on hand. There are smart phone apps and websites that help you find recipes with ingredients that you already have. Download apps such as Cooklist: Pantry Meals Recipes® or SuperCook Recipe by Ingredient® (also at [supercook.com/#/desktop](https://www.supercook.com/#/desktop))
- Look for recipes that share a main ingredient (for example beans or chicken) and buy foods in bulk. This can save you money.
- Make a grocery shopping list of what foods you will need to buy. Having a list can help you stay away from buying impulse items. Make sure you know the ingredients that you already have at home and will not need to buy.

If you have any questions, ask your care team.

Save money at the store

- Use coupons. Coupons can help you save on your grocery bill. You can clip coupons from newspapers, search online for digital coupons and use store membership options. If you already made a grocery list, look for coupons for those items before you shop.
- Compare prices and look for deals. If a product comes in different sized containers, check the “unit price” to compare cost.

- Think about buying frozen or canned foods. Not only can frozen and canned foods be healthy options, but they usually cost less and last longer than fresh produce. Choose canned foods that say “without added salt” or “packed in water.” Stay away from canned foods that say “packed in syrup.” Choose frozen vegetables without sauces and dressings.
- Buy whole produce instead of pre-cut and pre-chopped produce which can be more expensive.
- Buy larger containers of healthy foods, such as low-fat milk, yogurt, oats and nuts and measure out portions at home. The cost per ounce is usually more expensive for products that are packaged individually.
- Look at the discount section. Produce, meat, seafood and bakery sections in the store usually have some discounted foods. These foods may be getting near the end of their “sell by” dates, but might still be good if you use them or freeze the same day or the next day. If your budget and space allow, buy larger quantities of the discounted foods and freeze them to use later.
- Buy store brand or generic foods. You can buy foods like canned tomatoes, beans, olive oil, and frozen fruits and vegetables in a cheaper store brand version and still have quality, nutrition, and taste. It is still important to compare nutrition labels between brands of products to make sure you are not getting an item with more added salt, sugar or fat.
- Buy nutrient-dense foods that are filling. Even though fresh foods sometimes may cost more than highly-processed foods, fresh foods will keep you full longer.
- Do not buy more fresh foods than you can use in 1 week (unless you plan to freeze them). Buying too many foods that may go bad quickly can lead to more wasted food that needs to be thrown out. Use your meal planning to help limit buying just the right amount of fresh food than you will need for a week.

Healthy budget-friendly foods

Here are some healthy, foods you can add to your meal plan or grocery shopping list.

Proteins

Tip: Buy cuts of meat that are on sale. You can freeze these up to 3 months.

- Canned or dry legumes (such as beans, lentils and chickpeas)
- Canned chicken
- Canned tuna
- Chicken breasts, legs or thighs
- Cottage cheese
- Edamame (soy beans)
- Eggs
- Frozen tilapia
- Greek yogurt

- Ground turkey
- Peanut butter and nut butters
- Tofu

Fruits and vegetables

Tip: Buy whole produce. Pre-cut produce can be more expensive. These options can be fresh or frozen. If canned, choose “low sodium” vegetables, and fruit packed in water, not syrup and without added sugars.

Fruits

- Apples
- Bananas
- Grapes
- Lemons and limes
- Melons and cantaloupes
- Oranges
- Pears
- Watermelon

Vegetables

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Corn
- Cucumber
- Mixed vegetables (frozen)
- Iceberg or romaine lettuce (whole heads)
- Onion
- Potatoes/sweet potatoes
- Spinach
- Tomatoes
- Zucchini

Grains

- Brown rice
- Low-sugar cereal (such as no-added sugar bran cereal)
- Oatmeal
- Popcorn
- Whole grain or corn tortillas
- Whole grain or legume-based pasta
- Whole wheat bread

Other foods

- Low sodium stocks and broths
- Mustard and ketchup
- Marinara or spaghetti sauce in a jar
- Salsa
- Spices

If you have any questions, ask your care team.