

Stretch Food Dollars With A Little Planning

Tallahassee Democrat

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Nearly all of us are stretching our dollars as much as possible these days. Food prices in your community, income, convenience, and your shopping style influence how much you spend on groceries. Are you a “spender” or a “shopper?” A “spender” is a consumer who buys on impulse. A “shopper” is a wise consumer who knows exactly what he or she wants to buy. By planning ahead, you can save time and money by buying what you need and avoiding impulse items.

- Plan meals, including lunches and snacks, for the week. What foods does your family like? What’s on special? What do you already have on hand? Consider this: the most expensive food in your refrigerator is the food you throw out! Don’t let good food (and money) go to waste. Schedule a “clean out the fridge/freezer” night. Add leftover vegetables, rice, and pasta to soups and casseroles. Unused fruits can be used in gelatin, desserts, muffins, quick breads, and smoothies. Peel and freeze leftover bananas. Use old bread for French toast, pudding, or croutons.
- Know how much you have to spend and make a list. Keep the list in a convenient location for family members to add items as they are needed.
- Eat before you head to the store – an empty stomach can lead to a higher grocery bill!
- Shop alone, if possible, to save time and reduce impulse purchases by family members.
- Shop weekly or less often. Check circulars and shop around to find the best buys.
- Buy what is on your list first before buying “extras.”
- Shop the perimeter of the store – meat, dairy foods, and fresh and frozen produce usually are located here; more processed foods are in the center section of the store.
- Convenience foods, such as single-serving or heat-and-eat packages, often are higher in fat, sodium, and sugar. They also can cost considerably more than larger packages or home-prepared foods because you are paying for someone else to prepare and package the item for you. Consider making your own “convenience” foods by freezing leftovers in reusable containers to save money and eat more healthily.
- Look up and down on store shelves. You may be able to find less expensive products above or below eye level.
- Use unit pricing to compare the cost per serving or ounce. Many stores display this information on the shelf price label. To calculate it yourself, divide the price of the item by the number of ounces in the package. For example, an 8-ounce jar of Brand A mayonnaise sells for \$1.19; \$1.19 divided by 8 equals 15 cents per ounce. A 32-ounce jar of Brand B mayonnaise sells for \$2.95; \$2.95 divided by 32 equals 9 cents per ounce so Brand B would be less expensive per ounce. However, buy the quantity that is right for you to reduce waste.

- Stock your pantry. Keep a supply of basics on hand. Stock up on sales. Have quick recipes and ingredients on hand for fast or last-minute meals.
- Serve small portions for more meals (and less “waist”).
- Use less meat and more beans, vegetables, and pasta.
- Mix ground beef with oatmeal and bread crumbs to stretch servings.
- Make your own salad dressings.
- Cut down on coffee, soda, and sports drinks.
- Grow a garden.

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida IFAS - Washington/Holmes Counties Extension office at (850)638-6265, weekdays 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m.

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