

Plan To Save At The Grocery Store

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Time, money, nutritional value -- which one most influences your mealtime and shopping decisions? Making nutritious and cost conscious food choices is a challenge. Everyone knows the price of food, gas, and just about everything else has gone up. And time, there is never enough time. Feeding a family, especially one with growing children, can be time consuming and expensive. It's the beginning of a new year and a popular time for setting goals. There are many ways to save money without compromising nutrition; so this year let's "resolve to evolve" toward both, good health and saving money.

Creating and using meal plans and shopping lists can help families eat more nutritiously and decrease the amount of money and time spent on the entire food-consumption process. Planning can make our lives easier. Instead of planning for a month or even a week, a greater degree of success may be realized more quickly if we plan for just a few days. Increasing food prices are forcing us to make changes in our food-buying habits.

Menu Planning for Good Nutrition

- Consider food likes and dislikes of your family when planning menus. Include a variety of foods so they don't get bored. Get everyone involved in the planning process. Have the kids choose a fruit or vegetable to include with lunches or dinners.
- Plan meals that fit the time allowed. Quicker meals are more appropriate for busy weeknights, while new recipes can be tried on nights when you have more time.
- Inventory foods on hand. Note foods that need to be used soon.
- Build the menu plan around sale items using the weekly food ads.

Making the Menu Plan Work

- Post the menu so everyone can see it and as a reminder to defrost foods as necessary.
- If the family's schedule changes during the week, switch meals around.
- When the week is over, save the menu for reuse later.

Making a Shopping List

- Using the menu plan, write down items needed at the store.
- Post paper on the refrigerator door so it's convenient to write down items as they are used. Check out website, <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/plan/shoppingtools/masterlist/>, for some pre-prepared shopping lists that may also suit your needs.
- To save time shopping, organize your list according to the layout of the grocery store.

Preparing to Shop

- An inventory of the pantry, refrigerator and freezer will prevent you from buying food you already have on hand.

- TAKE the SHOPPING LIST!

Saving Money at the Grocery Store

- Don't shop hungry; hungry shoppers almost always buy more food than intended.
- If possible, shop alone. Others often want to add extra items to the cart.
- Avoid buying items not included on the shopping list, but be flexible. If carrots are on the list but corn is on sale and carrots aren't, you may decide to buy corn instead.
- For the best quality and to save money, buy fruits and vegetables in season.
- Buy store brands or generic brands.
- Compare unit prices. The cost per ounce or pound helps you determine the best value.
- Jot down or keep a mental list of prices of items you often purchase, i.e.; bread. You can make the wisest selection from among the various brands when familiar with prices.
- Limit extras like soda, alcohol, sweets, and chips, which have little or no nutritional value and greatly increase the grocery bill.
- Avoid buying large amounts of food that will go bad quickly. Spoiled food is a waste of money.
- Check your grocery receipt for price errors.

Stretching Food Dollars

- Prepare and eat more meals at home. It is much easier to control ingredients and portion sizes when preparing meals at home. Eating at home can save you calories, time and money!
- Include more vegetables, fruits, beans and whole grains and less meat in meals. Vegetarian meals can be much less expensive than those with meat, fish and poultry.
- Homemade salad dressings are often cheaper and healthier than those you buy in the store.
- For better nutrition and to save dollars, drink more tap water, low or no fat milk, and 100% fruit and/or vegetable juices. Buy less bottled water, coffee, tea, soda, and sports drinks.

Limiting Food Waste

- Give children small portions and let them ask for more.
- Use leftovers in packed lunches or for tomorrow's dinner. Safely store and plan to use the leftovers within two days.
- Be creative. Make French toast, bread pudding, or croutons from old bread. Use leftover veggies in casseroles or soups. Make soup broth or stock from bones. Use overly ripe fruits in shakes, baking, or gelatin salads.

Finding Help and Support

Although it may be difficult, reaching out may be necessary to find support for your family during difficult times. If eligible you may find food assistance from a variety of sources. The following are a few suggestions:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which is the federal government's food stamp program. Food stamps help single people and families with little or no income buy food. For information

regarding Food Stamp programs in Florida visit the Department of Children and Families at www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/access/ or call toll-free 1-866-762-2237.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program helps provide supplemental foods for pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding mothers, infants and children to 5 years of age. To find the telephone number for WIC in your county, call 1-800-342-3556 or visit www.FloridaWIC.org.

National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs are available for eligible children in public and private schools. Learn more at www.firn.edu/doe.firn/.

Local food pantries

Sources:

Eat Better for Le\$\$, Stretching Your Food Dollar without Compromising Nutrition, Florida Interagency Food and Nutrition Committee, http://fifnc.com/pdf/eat_better_for_less.pdf, 2009.

101+Ways to Save Food Dollars, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0757/>.

Spend Smart, Eat Smart. Iowa State University Extension, <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/>.

Dining on a Dime, Eating Better for Less, Kansas State University Extension Family Nutrition Program, <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/humannutrition/Dining.htm>.

If you have a question, write to Jo Shuford-Law, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 606-5203, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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