



Tips for Budget Grocery Shopping

Are you feeling the pinch of rising food prices? Here are some ways you can make the most of your food dollars:

Plan meals and make a list.

A sure way to overspend is by wandering through the aisles and tossing whatever looks good into your shopping cart. Instead, plan weekly menus and write a shopping list that corresponds with the store aisles. Look for menu planning and recipe help on your supermarket's web site. Many food store chains feature tools for planning and pricing meals.

Use coupons and reward cards.

Did you know that the Sunday inserts in your local newspaper have anywhere from \$50 to \$75 worth of coupons in them each week? Clipping coupons or printing them off from grocery store web sites can save you 10 to 15 percent on your grocery bill. Also, consider joining your supermarket's shoppers' club. Not only will you enjoy reduced price specials, but you may receive additional coupons for items you regularly purchase printed on the back of store receipts.

Buy store brands.

The Food Marketing Institute reports 56 percent of shoppers say they are economizing by buying store brand products (known as private label). Private label brands are often 15 to 20 percent less expensive than their national brand counterparts while the quality of the food may match the national brand.

Buy on sale and in bulk.

Cruising the aisle for sales on shelf-stable items or products you use regularly is a great way to save money. However, buy larger quantities only if you have space to store and use the food before it spoils.

Compare unit prices.

Use the "unit price" (price per pound, ounce or pint) to compare national brands with store and generic brands, or bulk and economy-sizes with single-serve or regular-size packages. Many stores show the unit price on the shelf tag underneath the item.

Read food labels.

Compare ingredients and nutrients using the % Daily Value. Purchase more nutrient-dense foods by keeping the saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium low while going for more fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Shop the perimeter.

Fresh produce, meats, dairy and breads tend to be on the outer perimeter of supermarkets, so start there before hitting the inner aisles for other necessities.

Shop seasonally and locally.

Fresh produce often costs less when it is in season and has less distance to travel. Visit a local farmer's market or join a produce club to take advantage of seasonal fruits and veggies.

Keep foods safe and prevent food waste.

Use dating information (“sell by” and “best used by”) to help select the freshest foods at the market. Put cold and frozen foods in your shopping cart last and store them right away in the refrigerator or freezer. Once you’re home, store foods so those with the oldest “sell by” dates will be used first. Know how long foods will stay viable after you bring them home (for example, eggs that are refrigerated properly last up to 6 months before they go bad).

Pay attention at the checkout.

Make sure prices are rung up as advertised or as indicated on the shelf label, especially for sale items. Some stores will even give you the item free if they make a mistake on the price.

Sidebar: Food Group Economics 101

Produce: Seasonal produce often offers the best nutritional value for your money. However, for produce that isn’t in season, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables might be more economical.

Grains: Count on whole-grain breads, cereals, pastas and other grain products to add variety to your meals at a low cost. Buy in bulk when possible and cook them yourself rather than buying quick-cooking or pre-seasoned varieties.

Dairy: Look for less expensive forms of milk, such as nonfat dry milk or gallon containers of skim milk.

Protein: Calculate cost per serving, not cost per pound, when buying protein (meat, poultry, fish, eggs and beans). Eggs, chicken and turkey are usually your most economical choices. Also consider vegetarian sources of protein like beans, peas and nuts.

Fats and Sweets: These items provide calories but little or no nutrients for the money spent.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or www.myguilford.com

Adapted from an article in the *ADA Times* July/August 2008 by Linda McDonald, MS, RD, LD