

New Year, New Eating Habits

Healthy Eating on a Budget

The first of each year brings a myriad of New Year's Resolutions and they usually consist of losing weight and changing our eating habits. Usually a few weeks into the year, we tend to resort back to eating unhealthy foods again. One of the most popular excuses we use is that healthy foods are just too expensive. However, with proper planning you can provide healthy meals to your family and save money.

There are 10 tips to eating better and healthier on a budget.

1. Prepare a Weekly Food Budget

Prepare a weekly or monthly food budget. Determine how much money you can spend and follow that budget.

2. Plan your Meals

When you plan your meals in advance you can save money because you are not making impulse buys. By following the USDA MyPlate guidelines, you can plan healthy meals which will help you control your calorie intake. Plan meals that will stretch your ingredients, such as prepare meats that can be used for another meal. Some examples are using leftover roast from dinner to make a stew for the next night.

3. Make a Shopping List

After you have planned your meals, check your pantry to see what items you have available and then make a list of what you need to buy. Either write it on paper or enter it into your cell phone. Rewrite your list according to your store's layout for easier shopping. Stick to purchasing only what is on your list to avoid impulse buys.

4. Compare Brands and Prices

Utilize store deals and coupons to get the best price. Always check the "Unit Price" located on the shelf below the product. Use this information to determine which brand and size is more economical for your needs. Be willingly to try the store brand, it is often comparable in taste to the name brand, but at a lower cost.

5. Buy Foods in Season

Purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in season because they are typically lower in cost and taste better. However, only buy what you are going to eat within a few days. When foods ruin you are throwing away your food dollars!

6. Frozen and Canned Fruits and Vegetables are a Good Option

Purchasing frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are cost saving and available year-round.

Choose frozen varieties that do not contain added sugar or sauces, low sodium or no salt added, and fruits in water or 100% fruit juice.

7. Buy in Bulk

It is typically cheaper to buy foods in bulk, such as family packs of meat or frozen vegetables and fruits that are on sale. The key to the success of this option is making sure you have storage space in your pantry and freezer for the food so it won't perish before you need it.

8. Avoid Convenience Foods

A good rule of thumb to remember: If hands have touched it to prepare it, then it will cost more. This includes frozen dinners and pre-cut fruits and vegetables. Also watch for higher prices of prepared salads, dinners, and desserts in the store. Meals made from scratch almost always save money!

9. Limit Foods with No Nutritional Value

Try to limit purchasing foods with no nutritional value such as chips, soda, candy, and cookies. Also read the labels of your morning breakfast cereal and try to avoid the ones that are full of sugar and opt for whole grains instead. It is always wise to purchase lean cuts of meat, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, or sugar free foods. Be a label reader! Know how to interpret the information on them to determine if it is a healthy option.

10. Prepare Meals at Home

One of the best ways to eat healthy on a budget is to prepare meals at home, rather than eat out. Be mindful of how you prepare the foods in order to protect their nutritional integrity. Instead of using butter or sauces on vegetables, opt to season them with fresh herbs and spices for flavoring. Choose healthier fats when preparing your dish by using olive or canola oil.

Another good tip is to prepare foods ahead of time and freeze them for those busy weeknights when you don't have a lot of time to cook. Packaging up leftovers for the lunch the next day is cost-effective and a healthy choice. Also, prepare healthy snacks to grab on the way out the door to school or work.

Adopting a healthy life-style does not have to be difficult or expensive, it just takes planning and time. So set your 2016 goals to include healthier eating habits and incorporating daily exercise into your family's life.

For more information on this topic, you may contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at rains.agrilife.org. We are also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences). Go and "Like" our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.

References:

United States Department of Agriculture 2015. Healthy Eating on a Budget.

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/budget>.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Publication. 10 Tips for Eating Healthy on a Budget.

<http://go.unl.edu>

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