

Eating Healthy in Challenging Times



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LIVE WELL UTAH

Check out these tips keep healthy food on your table no matter your financial situation.

We live in times that are unique to anything we've ever experienced. Our economy has brought about challenges, and many people are trying to survive on their paychecks. Layoffs, cutbacks and business failures have taken their toll, and we are left to use our resources to the best of our abilities and look for ways to make the most of what we already have.

Where do we pull money from when finances are tight? What is the most flexible budget item we have? It's the food budget. A lot of the other expenses don't change a lot from month to month. The mortgage or rent doesn't change, utilities are basically constant, so if the car breaks down or the kids need new shoes, it seems easiest to take the money from the food budget. That may leave many people living off ramen noodles or macaroni for the rest of the month.

Believe it or not, a few of the following simple behavior changes can reap big savings on the food budget, and a family can eat healthy meals inexpensively.

1. The first thing you need to do is learn to plan. You can't expect to get good results unless you put a little forethought into the process. Take note of what's on hand. What's in the refrigerator? This includes leftovers. What's in the pantry? What's on sale at the store? Begin to plan menus using this information. Try to build the main part of your meal around rice, noodles or other grains. Use small amounts of meat, poultry, fish or eggs. Plan snacks that give your family the nutrients they need. Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season. Keep them handy instead of potato chips. Use planned-overs to save time and money. Prepare a roast, serve half of it and freeze the remaining half to use

later for sandwiches, soups or stir fries.

2. After you've planned your menus, make a shopping list and stick to it. This helps avoid impulse buying. How often do you go into the store needing one thing and come out with a whole cart full of groceries?
3. Shop alone, when you're not hungry. When children accompany you, you tend to buy items you did not intend to buy. When you are hungry, everything looks good and you end up with a lot of unnecessary items.
4. Incorporate beans into your diet. These are a very inexpensive protein and can stretch a meal a long way.
5. Cook meals from scratch rather than using convenience foods. It's far cheaper. You can save a lot of money by washing your own lettuce, slicing your own cheese or peeling your own carrots. Don't pay extra for individual serving sizes. Buy yogurt, applesauce, cereal and snacks in large containers. It only takes a few moments to transfer servings into bags or reusable containers to pack in your lunch.
6. Compare fresh, frozen and canned food to see which is cheapest. Seasons affect the prices. One type is not always cheaper than another.
7. Use the cheaper store brands rather than name brands. Advertising costs add extensively to the cost of an item.
8. Cook soups or casseroles in large amounts and freeze for later meals. Cook once, eat twice. This saves time and money.
9. Buy items that are in season, on sale and available in bulk. Buy the large package of ground beef and divide it into meal-sized portions.
10. Change your eating habits. Give up luxury items like potato chips and soda. Cut down on fast foods. Our society has become very dependent on it. Some reports say we spend as much as 65 percent of our food budget on fast food! Much of this food is high in fat and calories

and not as nutritious as cooking your own.

It is possible to eat healthy meals on a reduced budget. It will take planning and effort, but the results will be well worth it!

This article was written by Ellen Serfustini, USU Extension FCS Agent, Carbon County