

TIPS FOR STRETCHING FOOD DOLLARS

When grocery prices climb, our food budgets often do not. Here are 8 tips to stretch your food dollars while not compromising on nutrition, taste or quality.

Tip #1

DETERMINE YOUR AVERAGE COST PER MEAL

- Start by calculating how much you spend today:
 - **Grocery spend in set time period / Number of meals in set time period = Average Cost per Meal**
- Set a goal for reducing your food cost
 - 5-10% is a realistic goal

Tip #3

CROSS-UTILIZE INGREDIENTS

- Menu 1 ingredient multiple ways
 - Ex: serve a whole grain tortilla in a taco (Monday), pinwheel (Wednesday) and breakfast burrito (Friday)
 - Ex: serve whole grain pasta in a pasta salad (Monday), spaghetti (Wednesday) and chicken noodle soup (Friday)
- Avoid solo ingredients
 - A block of cheese can be sliced, cubed or shredded vs. buying 3 separate items (sliced cheese, cubed cheese, shredded cheese)
- Find lower cost alternatives for specialty ingredients

Tip #2

STREAMLINE YOUR MENU

- Determine most-loved meals
 - Survey parents/guardians and children
 - Take note of plate waste
- Replace expensive meals that *aren't most-loved*
 - Premade items and brand name items are often the culprit
 - Consider scratch or semi-scratch cooking
 - Switch to generic brands when possible

Tip #4

SHOP FOR FOOD WITH BUDGET IN MIND

- Comparison shop
 - Use advertisements, websites, apps to compare costs
 - Switching to a lower cost grocery store can make a difference
- Write a list to avoid "impulse" buying
- Buy in bulk if it makes sense
 - Check the unit price vs. total cost
 - Not always best for fresh produce or specialty items



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Tip #5
STORING FOOD TO MAXIMIZE USAGE



Store fresh produce to maximize shelf life

<p>Refrigerator (40°F or less)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRUIT: Apples (>7 days), Berries, Cherries, Cut Fruit, Grapes • VEGETABLES: Green Beans, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Celery, Cut Vegetables, Green Leafy greens & lettuce, Mushrooms, Peas, Summer Squash, Sweet Corn. • Use within 1-3 days for maximum freshness.
<p>Room Temperature (50-70°F) until ripe (then refrigerate)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRUIT: Avocados, Kiwis, Nectarines, Peaches, Pears, Plums. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>Store these items in a paper bag or bowl (away from sunlight) to prevent loss of moisture.</i>
<p>Room Temperature (50-70°F)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRUIT: Apples (<7 days), Bananas, Citrus Fruits, Mangoes, Melon (uncut), Pineapples • VEGETABLES: Cucumber, Pumpkins, Tomatoes, Garlic, Winter Squash, Onions, Peppers, Potatoes (all varieties). • <i>Refrigerating these foods can prevent ripening and lose flavor and texture. Keep away from direct sunlight.</i>

Tip #6
FREEZE IT FOR LATER

- Most foods can be frozen and saved for later
 - Reheat frozen foods to 165°F
 - After thawing frozen food, use within 3-4 days
 - Foods with high water content, dairy and egg-based items don't freeze well
 - Tomatoes, lettuce, celery, cucumber
 - Milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, sour cream
 - Cooked eggs, mayonnaise

Tip #8
USE BUDGET-FRIENDLY FOODS OFTEN

- Find kid-approved recipes (like in Potpourri magazine!) featuring budget-friendly foods:
 - Dry beans, peas, rice, pasta
 - Nuts/seeds
 - Store brand items
 - Bulk cereals
 - Canned or pouch seafood
 - Frozen fruits and veggies
 - Raw produce (in season)

Tip #7
MEASURE FOOD

- Serve the correct portion
 - The serving size on the package is not always the portion you need to serve
- Use a measuring cup or spoon
 - "Eyeballing" your portion is often inaccurate
 - 1 cup does not always weigh 8 oz!
- Refer to CACFP guidelines for portion sizes based on a child's age

