

SHOPPING AND EATING ON A BUDGET

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

[Healthline Article | 19 Clever Ways to Eat Healthy on a Tight Budget](#)

Check out this and click the link above to read about each of the 19 tips. Each tip is briefly listed below with a comment on resources you might use or other helpful information. See if any of these tips will work for you!

HEALTHLINE TIP	JULIE'S COMMENT/TIP
1. Plan your meals.	Use the Meal Planning Template handout for this.
2. Stick to your grocery list.	It may help to order and pick up; avoid entering the store.
3. Cook at home.	Check out the recipe section for fresh ideas.
4. Cook large portions and use your leftovers.	Crockpot/one pot meals are great for this. Meal Prep recipes use this strategy intentionally. See recipe section.
5. Don't shop when you're hungry.	Ordering online and picking up would help, especially if the pick up time isn't immediate.
6. Buy whole foods.	A block of cheese is a great example. Shred it yourself for zero "fillers" or cut off a hunk or slice as needed.
7. Buy generic brands.	Be on the lookout for store brands and price/unit.
8. Avoid buying highly processed food.	Most of the time, highly processed foods are a bad choice. However, refer to handout " Processed Foods_Honorable Mentions " for a few that <u>could</u> be worth buying.
9. Stock up on sales.	Just be sure it is something you will actually use.
10. Buy cheaper cuts of meat.	Use in recipes like " Casseroles and One Pot Meals "
11. Replace meat with other proteins.	Eggs are a good choice. Omelets are great any time! Eggs can go in other one-dish meals too.
12. Shop for produce that's in season.	Use immediately or freeze for later. Use this link to know what is in season based on where you live.
13. Buy frozen fruits and vegetables.	Keep the freezer stocked with some "go to" items. See " Stock Up_Freezer Guide " & " Stock Up_Refrigerator Guide "
14. Buy in bulk.	As long as it is something you need/will use.
15. Grow your own produce.	Herbs are especially smart to grow yourself.
16. Pack your lunch.	Leftovers; meal prep; see handout for " Portable Lunches ". PLANNING is key to making this work (see #1 above).
17. Use coupons wisely.	Avoid coupons for junk food and highly processed foods.
18. Appreciate less expensive foods.	Examples: Eggs, beans/legumes. 44 Healthy Foods Under \$1
19. Buy from cheap, online retailers.	Amazon Prime Subscribe & Save can help for some items.

SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR STRETCHING THE BUDGET/AVOIDING FOOD WASTE:

❑ Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen

Use these lists to help decide which foods to buy organic versions of ([the Dirty Dozen](#)) or ones where you can go with conventional ([the Clean Fifteen](#)).

❑ Stretch protein sources.

Use casseroles, one pot meals, and salads to your advantage. The protein portion will go further in combination with veggies and other ingredients. Or add side dishes to go with the protein item. Grilled chicken breasts with a heavy side like creamed spinach is a good example.

❑ Use 2 meals/day instead of 3.

Imagine the savings you will have over the course of a year by eating one less meal each day! This strategy will also force you to choose more nutrient-dense options that can sustain you rather than junk food that gets you 2-3 hours of energy before you already need to eat again.

❑ Stop snacking.

It's not that you can't EVER have a snack. But many people snack and nibble all day long. This isn't good for your metabolism or for your budget. Keep some sensible items around for snacks when they are truly needed. See "Healthy Snacks" handout for ideas.

❑ Drink water.

This applies at home and at restaurants. Don't pay for a beverage when you eat out; have water with lemon instead. And avoid buying bottled water in plastic containers. You don't need the parabens/"obesogens" that will have leached into the water. See "Best Choices in Beverages" handout for ways to flavor your water and make it "special".

❑ Create a repeating menu.

If you use the "Meal Planning Template" to plan weekly meals, you can see over time what combinations work well together. With this information you could create your own repeating menu (maybe have 4 separate weeks, and then repeat it each month). You might even have a separate repeating menu for each season. Leave space for adding new recipes as you go so it can grow over time and not feel stagnant or boring.

❑ Cook in volume, then portion out.

This strategy works really well with casseroles, one pot meals, etc. The "Mushroom Burger Scramble" recipe is a good example of a casserole that makes 6 servings. Make it ahead of time, refrigerate and then cut into 6 neat portions. Freeze individual portions if you won't get them all eaten within a day or two. Soup can be portioned out too, to be sure each serving gets plenty of protein plus other ingredients. This strategy can improve portion control and prevent overeating, if you need to emphasize that strategy in your life.

❑ Use ice cube trays.

Do you ever open up a carton of chicken broth and then not use it all? How about your coconut or almond milk that has a short shelf life after being opened? Ice cube trays to the rescue! Simply pour the remaining liquid into an ice cube tray, then freeze. Remove from the freezer and unmold the perfectly portioned cubes into a large bag or container. Label and store in the freezer for future use. Coconut milk cubes are great in a smoothie later on!

❑ **Use up random ingredients/veggies.**

Don't let those few mushrooms, onions and other veggies go to waste! Make meals that use up these random ingredients. Omelets are great for this. Soup is another good strategy. Stir fry or saute your veggies and use as a side dish, or top with eggs as a "hash". Roasted veggies are always tasty; just toss your random medley with olive oil and roast in the oven for a side dish.

❑ **Buy a mix of fresh vs frozen items.**

When shopping, buy some items that can last longer (frozen items) as well as some fresh items. Plan your meals to use the fresh items first, then fall back to the refrigerated or frozen items later in the week.

[44 Healthy Foods Under \\$1](#)

This article may inspire you. Items 1-16 are the best ones for a lower carb meal plan. Follow the links on the article to find a variety of recipes. Use some "carb swaps" where necessary (for example, replace rice with riced cauliflower, if you are willing to do so). Some of the other options may work too, depending on your carb allowance.

[Forbes Article | Is Fast Food Really Cheaper Than Healthy Eating?](#)

This is the ongoing debate. We often THINK that fast food meals are cheaper. Maybe the price/meal actually is sometimes; but at what expense? If you value your health, then the long-term cost of eating less healthy meals may eventually result in a far greater expense in terms of medical bills, medications and other such things. Choosing healthy foods - as often as you can - is an investment in your health whose value is much greater than the pennies you can save in the short-term.
