

Healthy Eating on a Budget



We all know the feeling... you *should* be eating healthy, but the dollar menu at the nearby fast food restaurant is tempting.

Many people are under the impression that eating healthy costs exceptionally more than the convenient, and often subsidized, processed food choices. However, this is not necessarily the case. Being a savvy shopper can help cut your grocery bill, while still providing you and your family a healthy, balanced meal.

Try these tips for increasing your nutrient content without breaking the bank:

- Purchase in season.**
 Fruits and vegetables are often their cheapest when picked at their prime. Summer favorites include corn, cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, watermelon and zucchini. Even better, get your produce from your local farmer's market. Local food does not have to travel as far to get to you, so transportation costs that get added in to the final price are lower.
- Buy staples in bulk.**
 Foods with a long shelf life, like beans, grains and spices, can be purchased in large quantities to save money.
- Stock up on frozen fruits and vegetables.**
 When frozen just after harvest, fruits and vegetables retain much of their nutrients, and are a cheap way to round out your meal.
- Skip the convenience foods.**
 Grocery stores know that you are short on time, and have begun selling foods that have already been prepped: pre-sliced carrots and celery stalks, cleaned and trimmed chicken breasts, etc. While this can save you in prep time, it will cost you big at the checkout – these foods can cost up to twice as much as their unprepared counterparts.
- Prepare ahead of time.**
 By spending a little time on the weekend, you can prepare meals for the week in large batches, and avoid being tempted by the fast food drive thru lane. Prepare foods like pasta sauces and homemade soups in bulk, then divide meal-sized quantities into plastic bags and freeze until ready to use.

Skeptical About Low Cost Healthy Eating?

Check out 100daysofrealfood.com to see a real family of four in Charlotte, NC who cut out processed food for just \$125 per week - \$42 per week *less than* what a family of four would receive under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Also, take a few tips from survivingonstamps.com and follow NC chef, Sarah Bogan, on her personal challenge to eat healthy for 30 days on a food stamp budget.

Check out this easy, budget-friendly recipe from the USDA's *Healthy Eating on a Budget Cookbook*:



Crunchy Chicken Salad

2 cups cooked chicken (chunked)
 ½ cup celery
 ¼ cup green pepper
 ¼ red onion
 ½ cucumber
 ½ cup grapes
 1 apple
 ¼ cup plain yogurt

1. Chop the celery and green pepper into small pieces.
2. Peel and chop ¼ of a red onion.
3. Peel and chop half of a cucumber.
4. Chop the apple into small pieces. It is okay to leave the peel on the apple.
5. Cut the grapes in half.
6. Put all the ingredients in a large bowl and stir together.

Yields 5 servings. Each serving is ¾ cup and contains 140 calories, 4.5 grams of fat, and 17 grams of protein. The USDA estimates the cost of this dish at \$3.65 per recipe, or \$0.73 per serving.

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture: usda.gov; My Plate: myplate.gov; North Carolina Farm Fresh: ncfarmfresh.com