



Spend Smart. Eat Smart.

Vegetables

Eating vegetables provides many health benefits, including reduced risk of chronic disease.

Because each vegetable has unique nutrients, we need to choose a variety for meals and snacks—including dark green and orange vegetables and legumes. MyPyramid and the Dietary Guidelines recommend 1 ½ to 2 ½ cups of vegetables daily for elementary age children. Teens and adults need 2 ½ to 3 cups.

Vegetable servings can be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, canned, or dried/dehydrated; and whole, cut-up, or mashed.



Can you find the smart buy?

- Which of the following is the smart buy?
 - 1-pound bag of baby carrots @ \$1.19
 - 2-pound bag of baby carrots @ \$1.98
 - 2-pound bag of large carrots @ \$1.68
- Which of these is the smart buy?
 - 5-pound bag of russet potatoes @ \$2.00
 - 20-ounce package frozen French fries (6 servings) @ \$2.00
 - 16-ounce store-brand mashed potatoes (24 ½-cup servings) @ \$2.00
- Which of these is the smart buy?
 - 10-ounce bag of chopped lettuce @ \$1.29
 - 16-ounce bag of coleslaw mix @ \$1.29
 - 10-ounce bag of mixed specialty greens @ \$2.19
- What's the smart buy here?
 - Frozen Green Giant Green Bean Casserole (\$1.99 for 1.7cups)
 - Homemade Green bean casserole (\$3.69 for 6.5 cups)
 - Green Bean Casserole from the deli (\$2.49 for 2 cups)

(Answers on next page)

No endorsement of mentioned products or firms is intended nor is criticism implied of those not mentioned.

All prices in this publication were collected in central Iowa, Fall 2008. Although prices vary depending on date and location, the comparative differences generally follow a similar pattern.

Spend Smart ... compare fresh, frozen, and canned

Fresh

- Buy fresh vegetables in season. They cost less and are likely to be at their peak flavor. When not in season, frozen or canned versions are often a smarter buy. For example, buy fresh sweet corn in the summer but frozen or canned corn during other months.

- Wash vegetables before preparing or eating them. Under clean, running water, rub vegetables briskly with your hands to remove dirt and surface microorganisms. Dry with paper towels after washing.

- Consider price and personal philosophy when deciding whether to buy organic vegetables. They tend to cost more and research has not proven them to be nutritionally superior.

Frozen

- Commercially frozen products are frozen within hours of picking and tend to retain more flavor. They also have less sodium than canned.

- Buy plain frozen vegetables instead of those with special sauces or seasonings. Sauces or seasonings can add calories, fat, and sodium as well as cost.

- Compare prices and convenience when choosing package size. Bags offer the advantage of using just what you need.

Canned

- Consider store brands; they are usually lower priced and often packed by the same manufacturers as name brands.

- Choose the product most appropriate for intended use. For example, buy the least expensive chopped tomato for a soup or stew.

- Drain and rinse canned vegetables to reduce the sodium.



Spend Smart ... convenience costs money

• Salads

Pre-packaged lettuce and spinach are usually more expensive than buying bunch greens to wash at home. They also tend to spoil quickly after opening. Try other green salads, such as chopped cabbage, broccoli slaw, peas, or green beans mixed with low-fat dressing.

• Carrots

Pre-packaged baby carrots usually cost at least twice as much as regular carrots. Trade time for dollars by peeling, washing, and cutting your own. Refrigerate in airtight containers or bags; sprinkle with water if they start to look dry.

• Potatoes

A 5-pound bag has 12 to 15 potatoes—enough for 3 meals for a family of 4. If desired, add shredded or sliced cheese before serving. A similarly priced package of convenience potatoes typically has only 4 servings.

Spend Smart ... protect your investment

- Store vegetables and fruits in separate crispers in the refrigerator to protect them from bruising and to help control moisture.
- Practice smart vegetable storage

Store in refrigerator in plastic bag

About 1 week:

Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, peppers

Use within 3 to 5 days:

Asparagus, green beans, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, summer squash, sweet corn

Store in cool, dry place

Onions, potatoes, pumpkin, winter squash (acorn, butternut)

Tomatoes keep their flavor longer when stored stem-side down at room temperature.

- Monitor vegetable condition and use before they're past prime. Add to soup or stir fry, roast, or steam and serve at the next meal—or cool quickly and freeze in airtight container for a future meal.
- Create a ready-for-soup container. Label a freezer-weight bag and add chopped broccoli stems, cauliflower core, leftover onion, green pepper, mushrooms, or cooked vegetables as available. Add them to canned, frozen, or homemade soup.



Photo courtesy of Linda Naeve

Start a vegetable garden or plant a few vegetables in containers. Growing your own vegetables in season is great exercise, saves money, and provides fresh, nutritious produce from the garden.

Answers: Can you find the smart buy?

1. The 2-pound bag of large carrots is \$.84 per pound.
2. A 5-pound bag has about 15 cups (\$.13 per cup).
3. Coleslaw mix is \$.08 per ounce
4. Homemade costs half as much—plus you can use the low-sodium soup.

Check out these resources for more ideas and information

ISU Extension SpendSmart EatSmart
www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings

Guide to purchasing vegetables
www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM2034.pdf

Tip sheets on 66 fruits and vegetables
www.extension.iastate.edu/food/snackideas/index.htm

ISU AnswerLine
www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline (or call 1-800-262-3804)

ISU Extension Food, Nutrition and Health
www.extension.iastate.edu/healthnutrition

ISU Extension Distribution Center
www.extension.iastate.edu/store

MyPyramid
www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/vegetables.html

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