

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



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Saving Cents on Food Makes Good Sense

Nutrition educators are preaching the clear message “back to the basics” for saving money on food. Remember when eating out was just for special occasions? When was the last time you had supper ready in the slow cooker? Do you toss more lettuce in the trash than in the bowl? Are lentils and split peas on your grocery list?

To economize, people need to eat out less often and cook at home to save money and spend quality time with family members. A recent survey of over 200 food and nutrition professionals in the U.S. reported the top thing they were doing to save money on food was – eating out less often!

Foodandhealth.com reported that cooking at home does save money. For example, restaurant lasagna costs \$12.95 per serving, frozen lasagna costs \$2.95 per serving and lasagna made from scratch costs .80 per serving. A savings of fat, calories and sodium was also

noted with the scratch lasagna.

Fresh fruits and vegetables in season may be a good buy. Take advantage of inexpensive healthy options such as carrots, cabbage and potatoes. The least costly fruits to eat are watermelon, apples, raisins and bananas. Shopping for sales on store brands of canned fruits and vegetables could save cents for the budget. The shelf life of canned foods is about two years – stock up when on sale. Frozen varieties of vegetables in bags usually cost less and require less preparation than fresh. Planting a garden or even a little container garden can produce enough lettuce, tomatoes and herbs to last through the summer for fresh salads. According to the National Gardening Association, vegetable gardens are currently a \$1.4 billion-a-year industry – now that’s “locally grown.”

“Back to the basics” means shopping from a list, stocking up on sale items, buying less processed food,

cooking from scratch and making good use of left-overs. Households not accustomed to cooking may need to purchase basic kitchen equipment to prepare recipes at home. Purchase a steamer to cook fresh vegetables and rice to perfection, and a slow cooker to tenderize even the least expensive cuts of meat. Yes, slow cookers are safe. They cook foods slowly at a low temperature between 170 and 280 degrees. The direct heat from the pot, lengthy cooking time and steam created from the tight fitting lid destroy bacteria.

Processed foods are expensive and French fries top the list. Baking a potato in the microwave can save calories and money. Toaster ovens and microwaves use less energy than full-sized ovens and work well for cooking or warming small portions of food.

Think “basic” foods like potatoes, eggs, milk, pasta, rice and dried beans. Add lean

ground beef, chicken and turkey to casseroles and other dishes as a “side” and not as the center of the plate. Buying fewer chips, soda, cookies, crackers and convenience meals at the store saves cents. The least processed foods are generally the least expensive foods at the store. Not convinced? The chart below shows what \$13.00 can buy when a shopper considers more than just getting that next snack “fix”.

Here is an example of stretching the snack food dollars -- shopping with your wallet AND your palate in mind!

For about \$13.00, you could buy	OR that same \$13.00 could buy
1 pound bag cookies	4 bananas
10-ounce bag chips	3 apples
2 liter soda	3 pears
1/2 gallon ice cream	3 oranges
	12 broccoli stems
	10 long carrots
	1 pound raisins
	1 jar applesauce
	1 large can frozen orange juice concentrate
	and either a jar of peanut butter or ranch dressing for a dip

Which “snack group” has more vitamin A and C, more nutrition, more fiber, more servings and is more colorful? Which has more calories, more saturated fat, more trans fat, more sugar and more cholesterol? Which snack group would you choose for the price?

Food waste is money down the drain. Watch expiration dates and sell by dates and keep a list of what’s in the refrigerator, freezer and pantry. Make better use of left-overs or freeze half the recipe. Combining left-over vegetables with a pot of rice or pasta is a quick way to prepare a healthy entrée and reduce food waste.

Now is the time to bring back the basics - those often forgotten nutritious and affordable foods. The chart on the next page shows the least expensive fruits and vegetables to eat.

The least expensive vegetables to eat	The least expensive fruits to eat
Cabbage	Watermelon
Potatoes	Apples
Whole carrots	Raisins
Radishes	Bananas
Canned green beans	Grapefruit
Onions	Papayas
Cucumbers	Applesauce
Celery	Nectarines
Mustard greens	Pears
Bell peppers	Peaches
Lettuce	
Canned tomatoes	
Canned potatoes	
Canned corn	
Canned carrots	
Frozen green beans	
Cauliflower	
Kale	
Canned peas	
Sweet potatoes	
Broccoli	

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.

The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.

To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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