

## Bulletin #4331, Ideas for Planning Thrifty Menus

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### Thrifty Meals for Small Families

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If you like, use the sample menus in *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*, bulletin #4330, for a week or two. Then start to plan your own menus that will help you stick to your food budget. Here are ideas to consider:

- Choose low-cost foods; use unit pricing to find the best food prices.
- Use smaller amounts of meat, poultry and fish.
- Use dried beans, peas, and lentils as protein sources.
- Feature grain products.
- Alter favorite recipes.

- Avoid waste: plan for leftovers.
- Make your own convenience mixes.

## Choose Low-Cost Foods

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Low-cost meals do not have to be dull or lack variety. There are many low-cost, nutritious foods from which to choose. In fact, many favorite foods are low in cost, such as those used in the sample menus in companion bulletin #4330, *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*.

Some foods, including soda, candy, alcohol, coffee, and tea, are not in the menus because they are high in cost and low in nutrients. Some convenience foods, such as pastries and prepared foods, are not in the menus either because convenience foods cost more than similar foods you make at home. To get nutritious meals at low cost, you want most of your food money to pay off in nutrients.

- Check weekly grocery ads in your paper to find the best buys.
- Ground beef or turkey, chicken, and beef chuck steak are usually good meat buys.
- Plain frozen and canned vegetables often cost much less than vegetables sold with seasonings and sauces.

See bulletins [#4333](#) and [#4334](#) for the meals mentioned in this bulletin.

## Use Smaller Amounts of Meat, Poultry, and Fish

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Meat is a good source of several nutrients, but most meats are more expensive than other foods. Try combining small amounts of lower-cost meats, poultry, and fish with bread, rice, pasta, or potatoes for hearty main dishes. Dry beans, dry peas, eggs, and peanut butter can be used often in casseroles, soups, salads, and snacks. They provide the same nutrients as meat at lower cost, and often are lower in fat, too.

- To save time, cook enough beans for a few recipes. Cooked beans will keep 3 to 5 days in the refrigerator. Or when you are short on time, you may want to use canned beans even if they cost more.
- Potatoes in a main dish can stretch food dollars by making the meat go further.
- Meat alternatives such as cooked dry beans or lentils can be used in different ways to add variety at low cost.

## Feature Grain Products

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Enriched and whole-grain products are among the most economical sources of many vitamins and minerals. They can be a real plus in your diet. The sample menus in companion bulletin #4330, *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*, use a variety of grains and you may be surprised at the different ways they are used.

- Some people think foods such as bread, rice, potatoes and pasta are high in calories. It's not true. It's the toppings we often put on these foods, such as butter, margarine and sour cream that make them caloric.
- Plan menus that use a lot of low-cost cereals, bread, rice, and pasta foods. Such foods provide many nutrients at bargain prices.

## Alter Favorite Recipes

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You don't have to throw out the recipes and cookbooks that you have been using for years. Altering recipes to substitute low-fat ingredients for high-fat ingredients doesn't have to change the taste of your food.

- Use lower-fat substitutes when baking.
- Use fat-free milk to drink and in cooking.
- Use ground turkey in place of ground beef.

Simple changes can make your food lower in fat and lower in calories, so it's healthier for you. Here are a few examples to try.

<b>If your recipe calls for</b>	<b>Use this instead</b>
Whole milk	Fat-free milk
Evaporated milk or cream	Evaporated skim milk
1 cup butter or margarine	1/2 cup margarine plus 1/4 cup prune puree. (For some baked foods, you can substitute applesauce, plain yogurt, or prune butter or puree for equal amounts of fat. Try it out to see what works).
Shortening or lard	Soft, trans-fat-free margarine (The texture of some baked goods is changed significantly when light margarine is used, so is not recommended for baking.)
Mayonnaise or salad dressing	Nonfat or light mayonnaise or salad dressing; mustard in sandwiches.
1 whole egg	1/4 cup egg substitute or 2 egg whites
Cheese	Lower-fat cheeses
Cream cheese	Nonfat or light cream cheese
Sour cream	Nonfat or low-fat sour cream or yogurt

If your recipe calls for	Use this instead
Fat for greasing pans	Nonstick cooking spray
1 ounce baking chocolate	3 tablespoons cocoa powder plus 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Regular bouillon or broth	Low-sodium bouillon and broth
Pork bacon	Turkey bacon, lean ham, or Canadian bacon
Pork sausage	Ground skinless turkey
Ground beef or pork	Ground skinless turkey

### Recipe Substitutions

#### **Avoid Waste: Plan for Leftovers**

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Many foods don't come in packages small enough for one or two people. Buying larger packages than you really need sometimes results in wasted food. And that means money down the drain.

To avoid waste, try the "planned-over" idea. "Planned-over" means planning ahead to buy or prepare amounts of food that give you servings for more than one meal, and then planning ways to use the leftovers. For example, consider preparing a recipe for four and serving it twice. Or try cooking a large cut of meat or a whole chicken. Eat some, and save the rest to use in other main dishes. The menus in companion bulletin #4330, *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*, include planned-over recipes for braised turkey and beef chuck steak (Week 1). The menus for Week 2 include planned-over recipes for pork roast. "Planned-over" ideas like the two from the menus below can help.

#### **Planning for leftovers can save you time!**

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**Example:** Prepare and serve a roast pork dinner with biscuits. Save portions to make pork fajitas and pork sandwiches at later meals. Be sure to make enough biscuits for two or more meals.

<b>First Day:</b>	<b>Next Day:</b>
<b>NOON</b> Roast pork Baked potatoes Celery salad Biscuit	<b>MORNING</b> Orange quarters Oatmeal Biscuit Milk
<b>EVENING</b> Cheeseburgers on whole-wheat rolls Creole beans Pear slices	<b>NOON</b> Pork fajitas Melon wedge

## Make Your Own Convenience Mixes

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Everyone wants to get quick, healthy meals on the table for the family. But try not to reach for those store-bought convenience foods too fast. They can be very expensive. To help solve the problem, you can make your own low-cost convenience foods. The biscuit mix recipe in companion bulletin #4334, *Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts*, is used in the menus to make muffins, apple cobbler, and biscuits. This mix will keep for up to three months in the refrigerator. There is a pudding mix and a meatball mix, too.

Our bulletin #4029, *Saving Money With Homemade Convenience Mixes*, is also an excellent resource.

### See the other bulletins in the Thrifty Meals for Small Families series:

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- [Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families \(#4330\)](#)
  - [Buying Food for Thrifty Small Families \(#4332\)](#)
  - [Thrifty Recipes: Main Dishes \(#4333\)](#)
  - [Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts \(#4334\)](#)
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