

Eat Right on a Budget # 8 Helpful Tips

We all have a long list of good reasons to eat healthy foods. The problem is, many of us have even more excuses to opt for poor diet choices. A limited budget is one common reason that people have for choosing fast foods and packaged snacks over smarter alternatives. Fortunately, with a little education, you'll find that you can shop smart to eat smart.

1. Trash the Junk

The first step in your plan to eat right on a budget is to do away with junk foods. This is probably easiest if you shop alone. Kids, spouses, and friends can distract you from the task at hand, or encourage you to add a few "treats" to your basket. Shop solo, and be sure to have a snack before you leave for the grocery store. If you're hungry while you shop, you're much more likely to make snap decisions and opt for junk food. There are budget-wise alternatives, like easy-to-make oatmeal raisin cookies, that will satisfy the sweet tooth in your house.

2. Purge the Pop

Serve water or milk with meals instead of soft drinks. Pop is expensive and has absolutely no nutritional value, while milk and water are essential for good health for children and adults alike. Limit soft drinks to sporting events or the occasional night out, and buy small sizes to save on cash and calories.

3. Freeze Fruit Prices

When fruits are in season you can buy them at a fraction of the off-season price. Buy fresh seasonal fruits in quantity, and freeze or can them to preserve the goodness and save money all year long. Wash the fruit well, cut away any spoiled areas, dry the piece thoroughly and then freeze them in plastic zipper bags. Try freezing bags of strawberries, blueberries or raspberries, and just grab a handful of frozen berries anytime you need them. Peaches and pears are delicious canned. You can even freeze bananas to use in recipes like muffins and banana bread. Buying fresh fruits in quantity is a great way to eat right on a budget, all year long.

4. Best-Bet Beans

Beans are another excellent source of protein, and they are very easy on the pocketbook. Food guides recommend four servings of beans per week. Use beans as an alternative to meat whenever possible, such as in chili and pasta dishes. Add kidney and lima beans to soups and stews. Chickpeas are delicious and nutritious ways to add variety to a green salad. Wash dry beans and place them in a pot. Fill the pot with water, bring it to a boil, and then drain the water. This will help to alleviate any gas pains that you may experience from eating beans.

5. Moneywise Meats

Saving money is important, but should never be done at the expense of a proper diet. You and your family need to have a moderate amount of protein to be strong and healthy, and meats and beans are the best protein sources you'll find. Lean cuts of meat can be more expensive than regular cuts; try buying regular cuts of meat and trim away the fat before cooking, or skim it away after cooking. All types of meat can be frozen; so stock up when you find a bargain. Freeze meat right away and cook it as soon as it's thawed to prevent bacterial growth.

6. Protein # For Peanuts

Peanut butter is a smart shopper's best friend. A jar of peanut butter is inexpensive and goes a long way, from packing a lunchbox to satisfying a sweet craving. Snack on PB+J sandwiches instead of going to the corner store for chips or candy. For a snack kids love, whip up some "ants on a log" # just spread peanut butter on celery sticks and add a few raisins.

7. Catch of the Day

Seafood is available in most parts of the country. If you are lucky enough to live in a coastal area or where fish are plentiful, make seafood an integral part of your diet. Buy fresh fish, or stock up on frozen fillets when they're on sale. If you have a lake or river nearby, drop a line and catch your own dinner. It is fun and free # just be sure to check local regulations before you cast off.

8. Fill Up On Fluids

Foods that have high water content can keep you feeling full and are great for hydration. Try green salads, watermelon and even sugar-free gelatin.

Eating right will make you feel like royalty, and you don't need to spend like a monarch. There are many budget-friendly ways to make healthy food choices.