

HEALTHY EATING ON A BUDGET

INTRODUCTION

To feed a family and ensure that they enjoy optimal health, can be a daunting task for most people. To be successful, one has to practise common sense and be quite creative, especially in these times where inflation and the general cost of living is soaring continuously.

SIMPLE WOUNDS –WHAT TO DO

- Start off by familiarising yourself with the principles of good nutrition such as the five food groups.
- Make sure you know more or less the ratios between the food groups required for all age groups that you will be feeding, as well as the RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance) of vitamins and minerals needed.
- Should your family have any special dietary requirements related to a disorder, investigate this by consulting a dietician or a patient support group.

BALANCED DIET

A balanced diet is made up of the five food groups.

- Carbohydrates - starchy foods such as pasta, rice, oats, potatoes, noodles, breads, breakfasts cereals
- Protein – meat, fish, eggs
- Milk and dairy products. – cheese, yoghurt
- Fruit and vegetables
- Fats and sugars - butter, margarine, cooking oils, cream, salad dressings, chocolate, sugary soft drinks, sweets, jam, cakes, pudding, biscuits and pastries.

BACK TO BASICS - PLAN!

The most important stage of healthy eating on a budget is **PLANNING**.

- Set aside time to plan your menus for the next week.
 - This will prevent any high cost impulsive buying or ordering fast foods at the spur of the moment.
 - Before planning your meals, take stock of what food items are at home.
 - This will prevent buying unnecessary things and prevent wastage of expired foodstuffs.

- If you are feeding a few people, this is the time to confirm any unusual meal/snack requests for the following week such as packed lunches needed for excursions or school sport trips.
- Proactive information will prevent expensive and often unhealthy tuckshop visits or purchasing fast foods.

BACK TO BASICS - SHOPPING LIST

The next step is compiling the all important shopping list.

- Make sure you have knowledge of any sales, specials, 'two-for-the-price-of-one' offers at your local grocery/convenience store before you complete this list.
- Always consider the following: unprocessed food is far better for your health. Processed food contains excess amounts of salt and sugar and is generally far more expensive. Food in its natural state and prepared for consumption at home is far healthier and less expensive.
- You are now ready for action. Always remember: NEVER shop on an empty stomach! This leads to unnecessary purchases of high calorie, non-nutritious foodstuffs. When visiting your store, walk the periphery of the store first and purchase all the whole foods you require. The inner aisles of the store are usually made up of luxury, high priced goods and not of essentials for healthy eating.

One should always consider other cost drivers like electricity and gas, hence the preparation of larger quantities makes financial sense.

These can be stored in the fridge and reheated for later use. This will serve two purposes: a) it takes care of a few meals for the next week and b) it will save you time and money in the long-run.

GRAINS

- Buy unrefined items, not only are the whole grains less expensive they are more healthy.
- Unprocessed porridges such as oats and maize meal are inexpensive and do not have the hidden sugar that most cereals have.
- Unrefined brown rice is in fact quite cheap when compared to the cook-in-a-bag or pre-boiled versions. Once again, the processed presentation of a healthy grain such as rice, has hidden salt, colourants and preservatives that are all unhealthy.
- Avoid buying biscuits, chocolates and other snacks. These are expensive and not good for one's health. The amount of additives, preservatives, colourants, the hidden sugar and sodium are very high. A solution to this would be to purchase ingredients and make your own snack-like items e.g. date balls and non-buttered popcorn.



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PROTEIN

- Avoid all processed meat, they are expensive contain lots of salt and.
- Consider buying less expensive cuts of red meat. These can be used to create delicious soups, stews, stir fries and curries.
- They can also be prepared in bulk and frozen for later use. If you have left overs after a grilled chicken meal, use this to make a soup or chicken stock for another meal. This again will save you time and money!
- Consider alternative sources of protein such as fish, eggs, soya and legumes (beans).
- Canned fish is less expensive and readily available and the nutritious content is not affected by the canning process. Canned fish can also be used in various other dishes such as fish cakes and pies.
- Consider a meatless day serving eggs as the primary source of protein.
- Soya and other legumes (black-eyed beans, barloti beans, sugar beans) are all readily available in canned form and are an excellent source of protein. These can also be used to stretch a meat dish such as a stew or a bolognaise sauce.
- Look out for generic brands and bulk presentations. Very often you will see an unknown or store brand offering a 'six for the price of five'. This is a true saving.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

- Consider buying in-bulk fruits are available on special offer. Very often, in-season fruits and vegetables are sold at a reduced price to prevent them going off in-store. This is the ideal opportunity to process the fruits/veggies yourself and freeze or preserve for later usage (e.g. tomatoes can be blanched and frozen as purees to use in soups, bolognaise sauce). Or you can share these bulk presentations with friends or family. Butternut, potatoes and onions are cheaper when bought in packets, rather than loose ones.
- When using only part of a large fruit such as watermelon, blend the rest to be used later. A healthy option will be to blend this with natural yoghurt as a healthy drink – ideal for school lunch and/or sports trip and will prevent the emergency junk food purchase.
- Freezing chunks of fruit is a healthy alternative for sweet tooth cravings. Frozen grapes and strawberries are excellent for late night cravings.
- The first prize with regards inexpensive provision of fruit and vegetables, is without a doubt to grow your own.
- Apart from the financial benefit, this option offers many related benefits:
 - Growing your own veggies will give you a sense of achievement
 - Home-grown products are filled with nutrients without any insecticides
 - The psychological effects of nurturing a veggie garden is excellent
 - If you get the family involved, quality time is spent together
 - Children develop a healthy sense of responsibility when caring for a garden.
- There are many creative ways of cultivating veggie gardens whilst you are living in dense accommodation such as apartment b

buildings. Spinach, strawberries, potatoes and beans all do very well with high yields in portable fruit bag and pottery herb growers.

DAIRY

- Consider buying your milk in a plastic sachet, this is less expensive than a plastic bottle or a carton.
- Many dairy ingredients have cheaper substitutes. Some of these also offer a health benefit. For instance, low fat cottage cheese can be used instead of expensive cheeses such as ricotta or cheddar. One should consider using skimmed milk powder instead of expensive tea/coffee creamers.
- When cooking or baking, use condensed milk sparingly, as it can be quite expensive and the added sugar increases the calorie count of any dish.
- Buying in bulk will bring the price per unit down, so look out for specials and buy bigger quantities to save.

FATS

- For optimal health, it is recommended that a blend of butter, some soft margarine and some plant oils in limited quantities should be eaten.
- Take care when using fats during the preparation of food. There are certain oils, such as highly processed canola oil, that must never be heated.
- Be creative with your preparation of healthy meals, for instance, onions can be softened in a bit of water in the pan instead of frying it in butter or oil.
- To grill, steam and microwave foods is a healthy alternative to frying in fat.

CONCLUSION

Healthy eating does not have to be expensive, but it requires planning!

The most important things to remember:

Avoid all sugary and carbonated drinks. Drink water. It is undoubtedly the healthier and cheapest drink for all.

Always maintain variety in what you are eating - boredom leads to impulse purchases of junk food (expensive and unhealthy).

Always remember that food must be attractive. Even though you are preparing a healthy and inexpensive meal, spend a bit of time on presentation, use nice crockery and cutlery and use healthy, inexpensive garnishes such as parsley, chives and basil (especially when freshly picked in your own garden or from your own container).

Eating home cooked meals is always less expensive and healthier than eating out at a restaurant.

Use a calculator when doing the grocery shopping. This will help you to keep track and stick to your budget. It will also discourage you from impulse buying.

Investigate online shopping options, these sites often have very lucrative offers available, however you must have good pricing information to make a proper comparison.



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DISCLAIMER

TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

