

Eating on a Budget

Knowing how to fit nutritious items into your daily meals and household budget is important for your health and gives you the energy you need to stay mentally and physically active. Learning how to eat on a budget can also help your grocery money last longer whether you have assistance benefits, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or not.

Where do I start?

- Look in your cabinets, pantry, refrigerator, and freezer so you are aware of food or ingredients you have available.
- Create a menu for the week with food you have available. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's [MyPlate Kitchen website](#) can help with menu planning.
- Plan for leftovers. For example, if you always have salad ingredients left over after your Monday meals, plan a meal that goes well with salad ingredients the next day as well.
- Start a grocery list for any food items needed to complete meals.
- Find different ways to make the same food item. For example, canned peaches can be eaten by themselves; they can also be used in desserts or baked on pork chops to add extra flavor.

How do I save money?

- Cut coupons or download them to your online shopping apps. Many grocery stores have apps that can be downloaded on smartphones, which will often have coupons available.
- Use coupons for items on your grocery list, not for extra items you don't need.
- Sign up for discount cards or rewards programs at your local supermarket.
- Find out if a store has special saving events for seniors.
- Always check store inserts to find out what is on sale each week.
- Use an [online grocery budget calculator](#).

How can I shop better?

- Never shop hungry. Always eat before going to the grocery store. Shopping when you are hungry will make you want to purchase more than you need.

- Take a grocery list and try to stick to it.
- Try store brands. They are of the same quality and cost much less.
- Look at items on the bottom and top shelves. They often have cheaper prices.
- Use unit pricing to find out how much a product costs per ounce or serving to get the best deal for your money.
- Add beans and low sodium canned or frozen vegetables to bulk up meals.
- Check the “sell by” or “use by” dates. Many stores will have food items discounted because the sell-by date is that day. You can purchase those items for a meal that day or freeze those items to save money later.
- Take a calculator and as you shop, add up prices to stay within your budget.

What can I do at home?

- Store your food as soon as you get home. Put cold foods in the refrigerator and frozen foods in the freezer quickly so they don't spoil.
- Store dry food in a cool place and be sure to keep them off the floor.
- Use the earliest expiration dates first.

What do I do during a food shortage?

- Choose a mix of foods (shelf-stable, frozen, refrigerated, and fresh). Shelf-stable foods like pasta, rice, legumes, nut butters, and canned goods will keep for longer periods of time and avoid spoilage. Limit new recipes – stick with what works to avoid food waste.
- Buy only what you need at the time. Resist the urge to buy larger quantities. Plan to purchase enough for about 2 weeks.

How can I be sure I'm eating healthier?

Pay attention to the nutrients that are in your food when shopping. Cutting back on added sugars and salt when planning menus can improve your overall health. Follow the links below to help you make the best decisions when grocery shopping:

- [MyPlate - Cutting back on added sugars](#)
- [MyPlate - Be Salt Smart](#)
- [FDA - Using the Nutrition Fact Label](#)
- [Eldercare Locator \(find your local Area Agency on Aging\)](#)
- [Find a Nutrition Expert \(eatright.org\)](#)