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Taming the Food Budget

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Planning the family menu is a very personal matter. Two homemakers buying the same foods will probably place an entirely different menu before their families. One homemaker may have a flair for cooking while the other may prefer no frills.

Helping anyone to save money requires that they understand how they value their purchases.

For example, have you analyzed how many times a week you usually serve your family steaks, chops, and out-of-season fruits and vegetables? Each one will vary in the cost per serving depending on the current price. Have you sought ways to reduce the cost of your menus by using powdered nonfat milk and margarine in cooking or by using less tender cuts of meat more often? Do you feel that meat must be served at every meal?

All of these answers can influence the cost of your food.

Menu Planning

Plan basic menus. The number of days planned may depend on the available food storage space in your home, how frequently you shop, and the food budget. Plan to cook some food for more than one meal. This saves time and energy.

When planning your basic menu:

Check the weekly food ads. Compare the ads to find the store offering the best buys. Think twice before traveling all around town to take advantage of sales. You may be spending your savings on transportation.

- (a) Clip coupons for the items you NEED.
- (b) Give the sale items key places in your menus.

Think of the nutritional needs of your family. All should have some foods from each of the following food groups.

- Meat—2 servings daily. A serving is 2-3 ounces of lean meat, poultry or fish (all without bone) or 2 eggs; 1 cup cooked dry beans, dry peas or lentils; 4 tablespoons peanut butter.
- Vegetables and Fruits—4 or more servings daily. A serving is ½ cup vegetable or fruit, 1 medium orange or apple.
- Milk—8 ounce glasses
 - Children, under 9 2-3
 - Children 9-12 3
 - Teenagers 4 or more
 - Adult 2 or more
 - Pregnant 3 or more
 - Nursing 4 or more
- Breads and Cereals 4 or more servings daily.

One serving is 1 slice of bread; 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereals; ½ to ¾ cup cooked cereal, cornmeal, grits, macaroni and other pastas.

Before You Go to the Store

Take an inventory of the foods on hand. Scan EVERY food storage area . . . cabinets, refrigerator, and freezer.

Consider how much time YOU have for food preparation. The woman who works or is very active in her community may find it more economical in the time saved to buy prepared foods rather than “cooking for the week” over the weekend.

Plan menus that are within your budget. To find out how much, on the average, you spend for food, keep a record of your purchases for a few weeks. Count only the money spent for food, not household items such as detergents, toilet tissue, and gadgets.

Select the best form of food for you—frozen, canned, or fresh. Sometimes one may be a more economical buy than the others. If you use mostly frozen foods, think through whether or not you are storing too much of one item in the freezer thereby eliminating a place for frozen food sale items.

Consider what you know how to cook. You can learn to prepare different meats, for example, and increase chances of keeping your food budget down. It also makes for menu variety.

Make a shopping list. A shopping list must be flexible and easy to manage. List like foods together with the amounts needed.

Plan to shop alone. Many unnecessary purchases are the result of the urgings of tag-a-longs.

Watch your own impulses. An empty stomach can result in impulse buying.

In the Store

Compare the cost per serving of national and store-brand or generic brand items. Store-brand and generic brand items are usually less expensive and comparable in quality.

Use available unit pricing information. Unit Pricing can help you to compare the costs of various package sizes at a glance.

Don't add to food spoilage in the store. Unnecessary handling of foods, breaking open packages for a sample, or leaving a frozen food on the cookie shelf add costs that are passed on to the consumer.

Stick to your shopping list. If you find a food item is not available, substitute another that is similar.

Have frozen foods and meat placed in the same bag. They will keep colder that way.

After leaving the store go straight home. A car is not a refrigerator.

Store Foods Properly at Home

Meat, Poultry, and Fish

Transparent wrapped, prepackaged meat, poultry, and fish can be stored in the refrigerator for one to two days.

For longer storage re-wrap over the store wrap in moistureproof and vaporproof wrapping and freeze.

After cooking cover leftover meat lightly and refrigerate.

Frankfurters, hams, bacon, and sausage can be refrigerated in their original wrappings. Use within a week.

Eggs

Refrigerate, large end up. Use within a few weeks.

Fruits and Vegetables

Refrigerate all fresh vegetables except potatoes, sweet potatoes and onions. These keep well in a dry, cool place.

Fresh fruits should be ripe when stored in the refrigerator. Keep bananas at room temperature.

Sort berries and cherries. Refrigerate, unwashed.

Store apples away from lettuce and cabbage.

Canned Foods

Store in a cool, dry place not above 70°F. if possible.

Frozen Foods

Keep at 0°F. or colder until ready to use.

Dried Fruits

Store in vapor tight packages at room temperature or cooler. Refrigerator or freezer temperature is better.

Milk

Keep fresh milk in the refrigerator when not in use. Nonfat dry milk may be stored in a covered container at room temperature not higher than 75°F. It keeps longer at a cooler temperature. Refrigerate reconstituted dry milk as you would fresh fluid milk.

Making your food budget stretch requires more than just watching the prices of the items you purchase. Food spoilage due to poor shopping and storage practices or buying more food than you really need all can add to your food budget. So keep in mind these three key ideas:

- **Plan ahead.**
- **Practice good shopping habits.**
- **Store and prepare all foods with care.**

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