

Healthy eating on a budget

Healthy eating needn't be costly. With a little planning and some careful thought you really can make your money go further. Try our simple tips:

Buying meat:

Meat can be expensive and it's tempting to opt for cheaper processed meats such as sausages and burgers. But beware these can be high in saturated fat.

- Save money by keeping meat portions modest (75-125g or 3-5ozs) at a main meal
- Replace some of the meat in stews and casseroles with beans, peas or pulses. Dried beans and pulses are inexpensive and packed full of protein and soluble fibre but do need to be soaked overnight and then rapidly boiled for 10 minutes before putting into recipes. For convenience you can also buy them in cans
- Buy meat on special offer, 2 for the price of one and freeze the other for later use
- Chicken thighs and wings can be much cheaper than breast fillets. Even so, two breast fillets can feed 4 people in a stir fry, hearty soup or pasta dish
- Buy a larger joint or whole chicken and use the leftovers from the Sunday roast for sandwiches, salads and stir fries during the week

Buying rice, pasta, spices, ethnic foods and specialist products:

- Buying at ethnic stores means you can usually buy much cheaper and often in larger quantities. You could arrange to split bulk purchases with friends, neighbours or relatives

Buying fruit and vegetables:

With perishable foods like fruit and vegetables it is best to buy only what you can easily consume within a few days.

- Buy fruit and vegetables in season whenever possible
- Use local market stalls and traders, if you go later in the day you are more likely to pick up end of the day bargains
- Try pick-your-own and freeze any excess soft fruit for use out of season
- Try growing one or two vegetables or fruits yourself and swap produce with friends
- Keep value brands of cans of tomatoes, sweetcorn and pulses in your cupboard as a quick standby

Buying in the supermarket

- Never visit supermarkets on an empty stomach
- Prepare a shopping list and try to stick to it
- Don't buy more than you need
- Don't assume that larger pack sizes or own label are better value for money – compare the price per 100g
- Look for cheaper versions on higher or lower shelves
- Take a calculator with you and add up the costs as you go along
- Try to avoid adding foods to your trolley that have little nutrient value such as bottled water, fizzy drinks, alcohol and fancy cakes and biscuits
- Ready made meals although convenient can be expensive, try cooking from scratch if you can
- Check ready meals and other foods for their fat content - more than 20g fat or 5g of saturated fat per 100g means they contain a lot

Healthy wholesome low cost family meals

- Spaghetti bolognese or chilli con carne served with peas and sweetcorn
- Jacket potatoes with tuna and salad
- Baked beans, mushrooms and scrambled egg on toast
- Hearty vegetable soup made with stock (from chicken bones) and a selection of vegetables and pulses. Served with crusty bread
- Chicken and vegetable stir fry served with noodles
- Pasta with tuna and vegetables, add a spoon of pesto for added flavour
- Smoked fish with vegetables and rice. Add a spoon full of curry paste and mix together for a healthy kedgeree, top with quarters of hard boiled egg
- Flake cooked fish and vegetables in a little white sauce, top with fluffy mashed potato and bake for a satisfying fish pie

Top tip's to make your money go further

- Base meals on pasta, rice, potatoes, chapati, bread, noodles, yam. Not only are they filling but they are cheap too. Wholegrain varieties are healthier and even more filling but often more expensive
- Try to have one or more fruits or vegetables at each meal. Remember fresh, canned, frozen, dried and juices all count and may help your money go further
- Ditch the takeaways, no matter how tempting they are – they can be expensive and are often packed full of fat, sugar and salt. Cooking can be an effort but will save you money
- Make sure you have a proper breakfast or take your breakfast to work with you. You'll be less tempted to buy costly snacks mid-morning
- If going out, make your own lunch and take it with you. Buying lunch out or eating in the staff canteen can be expensive
- Take your own snacks (such as fresh and dried fruit and nuts) with you, its cheaper than buying them when you are out

Where to get further help

Some areas may have local food initiatives that can help you gain valuable food and cooking skills. Are you receiving the welfare benefits you are entitled to? Ask at your local surgery, Sure Start Children's Centre, library or Citizens Advice Bureau.