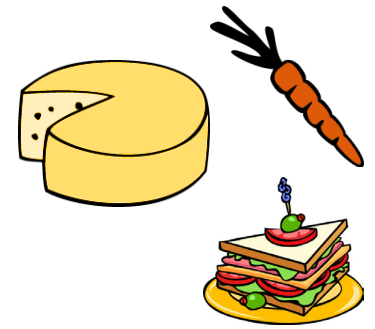


BUDGETING YOUR FOOD

ATUMF



With budgets shrinking and the prices of some agricultural commodities rising, the effects can be felt directly...in your shopping bag. The goal of this communication is to give you an idea of how easy it is to eat off around \$5 a day (although at \$5 a day it may seem like you're camping, you still get the calories you need). To put this in perspective, students paying \$1,910/semester for 19 meals a week (and \$115 in points at the Snack Shack) over 15 weeks are essentially paying \$128/week or \$18/day. There is large potential to save money by shopping for your own food IF you know how to go about it...by the same token, though, if you don't plan and execute shops exactly as you plan them, this exercise is valueless and you should stick with the meal plan.

There are a number of rules to live by if you want to be able to stretch your budget and eat well; they may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how much less you spend when you plan your grocery shopping ahead of time.

Develop your meal plan based around sale items; use the local paper to find coupon sections for your local grocery stores. If you don't receive the local paper, you can go in to the store and ask for a coupon sheet and if you're proactive, you can even read your food ad in advance on websites like A Full Cup and then buy your coupons.

A VERY GENERAL GUIDE ON HOW TO BUY:

PRODUCE: Generally, produce will have some items that are 'manager's special:' those items are a goldmine, and they can be found all over the store, and not only in the produce isle. Taking home a 10 lb bag of potatoes is a great investment because they go a long way, and they're cheap. Often, potatoes will have coupon offerings as well, making them stretch even further for your buck. 12-ounce bags of frozen veggies are also a savvy shopper's go-to (unfortunately, fresh greens are less likely to be priced so they fly off the shelf). One-pot meals are a blessing and get the shopping, cooking and most of the cleaning out of the way for a few days in one go. With that in mind, it is a good idea to grab a couple of pounds of carrots, an onion and celery in case stew is on your mind.

CANNED GOODS: You can rarely go wrong with canned goods: tomato sauce and salsa, two cans of soup, two cans of diced tomatoes, tomato paste and a couple cans of tuna (chunk light is the cheapest).

PROTEIN: Generally, protein is slightly more expensive, and it is also the foundation of many students' diets, so it's wise to learn to scoop up deals when they're available. Usually there will be items marked as 'best deal' or 'family friendly price' or something of the sort, and those items are the ones to get. Do all of your protein shopping for two or three weeks in one grocery store visit. For stewing you can buy 4 pounds of beef (whether you use it or not, it can always go right in the freezer) and maybe a package (or two) of 20 chicken breast tenders. As soon as you get home, open the chicken tenders and put them in individual Ziploc snack bags so you can freeze them all, and it will take about 10 minutes to completely thaw two out in a pot of warm water; soon enough, they'll be ready to cook. Chicken and beef are also great because there are a multitude of one-pot uses for them (stews, soups) and other cheap ways to prepare them (stir fry, chicken salad, chili, etc).

MISCELLANEOUS: Rice, multigrain bread (whole wheat breads give you energy for longer, and help you feel more full...don't skimp and go with white bread...it's not worth it), quinoa (a very nutritious and filling sprout), oil, sugar, cornmeal, milk, and a couple bags of your favorite snacks. Using sale ads and coupons and a smart-shopping methodology; a grocery list like that one should cost around 50 dollars and last you around ten days.

SHOP WITH A PLAN:

Don't limit yourself to one option if you have several in the area; in our case we can take advantage of Tranten's in town, Hannaford and Wal-Mart on route 4, and all within about five miles. Pay attention to store ads in the paper and see what is on sale where. If you're going to go shopping, you might as well make an afternoon out of it and go where the items on your list are cheapest, wherever that may be; you may find that this week you go to Tranten's for meat and Hannaford for produce and Wal-Mart for your miscellaneous goods, and maybe in two weeks things change. That is the importance of planning ahead and finding where you're going to be able to save the most money on your grocery list items. You can find five-pound bags of rice for around \$3 or less and they come out to around 6 cents a serving!

COOK WITH A PLAN:

As we've noted, one-pot meals are a smart way to save time and money. Making your own soup stock from leftover chicken bones and pan juices is a free way to create healthier stock than you would have otherwise had to buy. Soup or stew in combination with cornbread can be a delicious and filling way to stretch your budget, and if you make up an extra large batch you can freeze it in single serving portions and have them ready to go any night you wish. If you cook an ingredient and don't use all of it (such as rice, or beans or what have you) save that ingredient in the fridge and use it to fill out another meal, later. Another way to stretch your budget is to remove meat as the primary food item on the plate, instead, mix it into a stir-fry or chili. Instead of having a chicken breast on every plate you eat, you can cook up a stir-fry with two chicken breasts and those frozen veggies and refrigerate it to last you through the week. If you pick up produce on 'manager's special' (such as slightly over-ripe fruit) turn it into another dish (banana bread, applesauce) to make the most use of it.

