

Menu Planning & Food Budget Info

Research shows the benefits of meal planning:

They found that when parents planned family dinner, adolescent attendance at family dinners increased. They also found that when the parents had a positive perception of family dinner, it increased the children's family dinner attendance directly. There was also an indirect relationship, "by increasing the likelihood of mother's dinner planning and increasing the likelihood that children perceive that eating dinner with family is important" (McIntosh, et al., 2010, p. 625). This research found that there is a positive relationship between parents planning meals, having encouraging attitudes, and the frequency of their children attending family dinner.

Printable monthly menu forms:

<http://organizedhome.com/printable/household-notebook/month-meals>

<http://www.noordinarymomentsblog.com/2012/01/monthly-menu-planner-editable-pdf.html>

Printable weekly menu forms:

<http://organizedhome.com/printable/household-notebook/weekly-menu-planner>

Tips to start menu planning:

- **Take inventory** Start by taking inventory of what you have on hand and plan your meals based on that. It's estimated that a family of four throws away an average of \$500 a year in spoiled food alone!
- **Prepare a menu in advance.** Gather recipes for a month or a week at a time then build your shopping list around your menu. Remember to factor in leftovers when planning your menu. For example, if you have roast on Sunday, then you could serve shredded beef enchiladas on Tuesday.
- **Write your shopping list according to the layout of the supermarket.** This not only saves time, but also saves you from wandering down aisles and making impulse purchases.
- **Shop with a list** Use a shopping list to avoid bringing home extra items and staying in the store too long. Studies show the longer you're in the supermarket, the more money you spend. Get in and get out.
- **Use ads and coupons to save money on items on your list.** Don't assume that just because it is on sale it is the best buy. You can use weekly ads to help plan your menu economically.
- **Eat before you shop** Avoid food shopping when you're hungry. It's a budget-buster that leads to buyer's remorse.
- **Shop by what's in season** Seasonal produce is less expensive and usually tastes better. In the fall and winter, focus on fresh sweet potatoes, dark leafy greens, pears, apples and citrus. In the warmer months, go for berries, melons and green beans. Year-round: Stock up on frozen fruits

and vegetables when they are on sale. Just be sure to select the ones without any added salt or sugar.

- **Make extra servings** of freezable meals like pasta, soup or casseroles. This is like creating your own microwavable frozen entrée without the high price tag, the excess sodium, or a trip to the store.
- **Use less meat:** Evidence continues to mount on the benefits of plant-based diets. Go meatless at least once a week. When you do serve meat, stick to small portions to save money and keep meals healthy. Opt for inexpensive proteins like beans, peanut butter, eggs, canned tuna and sardines, which are all inexpensive yet incredibly nutritious sources of protein.
- **Minimize food waste:** Clip your bags, keep nuts in the fridge, and only purchase as much food as you and your family will eat before it spoils. This will keep your hard-earned money out of the trash can.
- **Cook at home whenever possible.** It generally costs more money (and calories) to dine out. While it's easy to grab a meal on the run, you pay for that convenience. Take your lunch to work and save dining out for special occasions.
- **Stock up on canned and nonperishable foods when they are on sale.** That way, you only need to purchase perishables such as dairy, produce and meats during your weekly or bi-weekly shopping trips.
- **Consider buying in bulk.** If possible, buy hamburger or other meats on sale, then package in small quantities and freeze. For example: you can buy family/economy size packages of hamburger, brown it, then freeze the cooked hamburger in bags ready to add to tacos, spaghetti or casseroles.
- **Buy quantities that you will use.** Just because a larger package is cheaper doesn't mean you will save money in the end. Buy what you need and keep in mind your ability to store it and use it later.
- **Use unit pricing compare cost.** Price per pound and ounce are the most common units used in unit pricing. This is the only true way to get the best buy.
- **Shop the outside perimeter of the store.** Make healthful choices a priority by shopping for sale items in the produce, meat, dairy and bakery sections. Usually the inside aisles contain more convenience foods which are often more expensive and less healthful.
- **Shop Bakery Outlets.** Franz or Old Home bakery outlets are a great place to buy bread at half price or better.
- **Rethink Organic Produce.** Organic produce is often more expensive but equivalent in nutritional value.

Strategies for Your Food Budget

Sometimes homemade is more expensive than store-bought:

Buy bread (homemade almost 2 times the price)

Make yogurt (3/4 the price of store bought)

Make cake (cake mix is cheapest (1/4 the price)

Granola is a wash – both about the same price

Fruit or veggie trays – make your own for almost ½ the price

Some of the cheapest foods are healthiest:

1. Brown Rice or pearl barley

Price per serving: 18 cents.

2. Whole-Wheat or Multigrain Pasta

Price per serving? About 24 cents.

3. 100% Whole-Wheat Bread

Price per serving: About 18 cents.

4. Nonfat Greek Yogurt

Price per serving: Individual servings (6- to 8-ounce containers) cost about 89 cents 43 cents bought in bulk

5. Old-Fashioned Oats

Price per serving: 13 cents

6. Frozen Vegetables

What's a serving? 1 cup.

Price per serving: Around 25 cents.

7. Russet Potato

Price per serving: About 33 cents per potato.

8. Fresh Bagged Spinach

Price per serving: 66 cents for a 4-cup serving; 33 cents for a 2-cup

9. Canned Refried Beans

Price per serving: About 34 cents.

10. Canned Tuna

Price per serving: About 70 cents for chunk white albacore in water.

11. Canned or Jarred Marinara Sauce

Price per serving: About 28 cents.

12. Whole Wheat Pita Bread

Price per serving: 30 to 55 cents.

13. Store-Brand Egg Substitute or eggs

Price per serving: 25 to 37 cents. 1 egg = 12-15 cents

14. Frozen Edamame (Soybeans)

Price per serving: 56 cents.

15. Dried Lentils

Price per serving: 10 cents

16. Popcorn. Microwave popcorn can cost up to \$5.00 per pound while unpopped kernels cost about \$.50 per pound. Try air popping or using a paper bag to pop it in the microwave.

Eating behaviors to control food costs:

1. Dine regularly: Think of the hunger-scale. When we get too hungry, we eat quicker and more, causing us to eat more than we normally would. Also when we are ravenously hungry, we tend to go for convenience, less nutritious foods.
2. Dine carefully: Be sure to eat with balance in mind. A plate with $\frac{1}{2}$ plants (fruits and veggies, $\frac{1}{4}$ grains (hopefully whole) and $\frac{1}{4}$ protein will provide plenty of fiber and other nutrients such as some protein to keep you satisfied longer.
3. Dine tastefully: We are more satisfied with a variety of flavors and textures. If we always have the same old thing, we'll get bored and go in search of other things to nosh on.
4. Dine mindfully: Don't zone out in front of the TV and inadvertently finish off the popcorn, chips etc.