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Food for Thought

How To Get More Nutritional Bang for Your Buck

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By Tara Mardigan, M.S., M.P.H., R.D.
Brigham and Women's Hospital

Is it really possible to eat healthfully on a tight budget? The rising cost of food is a concern for many consumers lately. Many people are making food choices based on their pocketbooks, sometimes at the steep cost of nutrition quality.

Believe it or not, you don't need to rely on cheap sources of calories from fast foods or convenience foods while watching your food bill. In fact, some convenience and packaged foods can actually be more expensive than fresh foods. Here are some wallet-saving tips that will help keep your waistline in check.

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Pick a stable shopping day each week.

Do your grocery shopping on the same day of each week. This will help prevent you from making extra trips to the store. Set up and stick to a simple budget to help you save money and skip the extra frills that you don't need.

Shop from a list.

This will help you buy only the items that you need. Check out store mailings and in-store flyers. Many grocery stores have online newsletters with healthy recipes and store specials or

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coupons. Consider buying good bargains in bulk, but only if you have the space to store the food properly without wasting it.

Shop satisfied.

We all know what happens when you go shopping while your stomach is rumbling! You end up putting all sorts of goodies into the cart that you don't need (or want). Such convenience foods end up being quite costly on the wallet and are also usually high in calories. Be sure to eat something before you go shopping.

Save on gas, save on time; get online.

Try an online food delivery service. You can choose the foods with the pre-order service — without the temptations of making choices in the store. The savings can add up, especially when you take advantage of coupons and specials. Here are a few money-saving tips/p>

- Choose a longer delivery window to save on your delivery fee.
- Look for discounts offered for off-peak delivery times.
- Stock up on dry items, for which there is a flat delivery rate.

Cook at home.

The cost of eating out and grabbing take-out really adds up. Plan your meals for a week at a time. Enhance soups, casseroles, salads, wraps and sandwiches with leftovers. Invest in good freezer bags and sturdy storage containers.

Join a dinner club.

Look for a small group of friends who are also interested in good food and good conversation. Many groups meet once a month; people take turns hosting. To keep costs reasonable, have different people bring different items, similar to a potluck dinner.

Have others do the prep and cleanup.

Consider a local meal preparation franchise. You can assemble a variety of dinners at a specific franchise location by following simple directions with pre-cut, pre-portioned ingredients. Just freeze the food and reheat it when you want to

use it. Although cost varies by location, this option is probably less expensive — and healthier — than ordering out a few times a week.

Keep it local.

Farmers' markets and community supported agriculture groups (CSAs) are excellent ways to support the local economy and enjoy farm fresh produce and spices. To find a farmers' market or CSA group in your area, go to:

- starchefs.com
- eatwellguide.com
- localharvest.org

Fill your freezer.

If you throw away fresh produce because it goes bad, frozen is the way to go. Frozen fruits and vegetables provide a consistent quality and freshness sometimes lacking in fresh vegetables. Frozen vegetables are easy to prepare and cook faster than fresh vegetables. You can store them for up to 12 months with no detectable deterioration in nutritional value.

Buy organic from time to time.

Organic foods can cost nearly double the price of conventional foods. Choosing organic for only those foods consistently most contaminated with pesticides is a rational and economical way to choose organic foods. The [Environmental Working Group](#) has ranked produce by its pesticide content based on data from collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration between 2000 and 2005. The top 12 fresh fruits and vegetables with the greatest amounts of pesticide residue are:

- Peaches
- Apples
- Sweet bell peppers
- Celery
- Nectarines
- Strawberries
- Cherries
- Lettuce
- Grapes – imported
- Pears

Make your premium cup of coffee or tea at home.

Save on coffee from Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts (as well as other coffee franchises) by buying it by the bag and brewing it at home.

Split it up.

Split large entrees in half when eating out and share with a dinner partner or take home for another meal. Order sides of cooked vegetables or salad to round out the meal.

Slow down.

Eat slower and more mindfully. You'll eat less!

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Tara Mardigan, M.S., R.D., M.P.H. is a nutritionist at Brigham and Women's Hospital. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in nutrition from the University of New Hampshire. She completed her internship at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut and worked for three years as an inpatient dietitian at Massachusetts General Hospital before getting her master's degrees in nutrition and communication as well as public health at Tufts University.

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