

Eating Well For Less

Document developed by Mapleton Teaching Kitchen 2011



TIPS & RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY FOOD MENTORS

EATING WELL ON A BUDGET

Food takes a big bite from most of our household incomes, but eating nutritious & tasty meals IS possible with skills in:

- ▶ Menu planning
- ▶ Smart shopping
- ▶ Proper food storage



1. PLANNING AHEAD IS KEY:

1. Determine your weekly BUDGET amount for food.
2. Set time aside to PLAN your MEALS for that week.
3. Make and use a GROCERY LIST based on that plan

BENEFITS OF MEAL PLANNING:

Everyone eats – whether the meals are planned or not. The quality of meals is greatly affected by the planning that goes into them. Whether you are on your own or a family of six, there are many benefits of menu planning.

- Helps save you TIME in the kitchen
- Helps ensure your meals are VARIED , HEALTHY & BALANCED
- Helps you SAVE money & keep within your food budget
- Helps create less stressful meal times
- Helps reduce food WASTE as you can plan FOR leftovers
- Helps make use of the foods you have on hand
- Reduces impulse buying and extra trips to the store
- Lets you plan according to weekly specials
- You will buy fewer more expensive prepared meals
- Everyone in the house will know what is planned for meals
- If there is more than one cook in the house, a posted menu plan allows whoever gets home first to start the meal.



Menu planning involves thinking about ways to make all aspects of mealtimes simpler, from shopping to cooking to using leftovers. . Creating a menu is a small investment of time that can reap great rewards, once you have a system in place the rest will be a breeze.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN MEAL PLANNING:

- COST: Plan for foods that fit into your budget.
- Check supplies ON HAND to see what needs to be used up.
- What's ON SPECIAL; the best bargain can determine what you'll make

- VARIETY: Choose foods in a variety of colours, tastes, textures, cooking methods & temperatures. Keeps your menu interesting.
- NUTRITIONAL or dietary NEEDS of family members.
- Personal TASTES, likes or dislikes
- AVAILABILITY of food: what's in season.
- CLIMATE: Less oven cooking in summer, more stews in winter....
- Distance to shopping & availability of TRANSPORTATION.
- STORAGE: Before buying anything in bulk, consider storage space
- Family or personal LIKES & DISLIKES, but offering chance to try new
- TIME: How much time do you have to prepare meals. Don't forget to consider a recipe's "cooking time" also.
- COOKING SKILL: keep recipes within your cooking skill range.



MENU PLANNING TIPS:

- Plan your menu with CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE suggestions in mind
- Start by planning your main meal each day then plan for breakfast, lunch and snacks too.
- Remember snacks should be nutritious too: low in fat, salt & sugar.
- Allow for some "flexibility" in your plan, so that if changes are necessary, it doesn't cause excess stress
- Plan your menu around WEEKLY store SPECIALS.
- COOK ONCE – EAT TWICE: The main ingredient for several meals can be made at one time: Roast chicken one night, leftovers can be used for chicken fajitas & the bones can be used to make soup stock.
- Plan for menu items that use less meat: stir fry, casseroles:
- Consider a few MEATLESS meals each week (veggie chili, soups, omelettes, salads, stir fry, quesadillas, lasagne.....)
- Plan for a meal that includes fish once or twice a week.
- Invest in some good freezer containers or bags. Shallow containers that stack allow for quick cooling and best use of freezer space. Use masking tape & a permanent marker to label & date containers avoiding "UFO's" (Unidentified Frozen Objects)



- Plan to prepare a few "complete meals" in larger quantities and make your own DIY frozen dinners.
- Plan to cook something in a large batch and freeze smaller portions for later. ie: spaghetti, chili, soups.
- Schedule a "cook's choice" day if you are the creative type
- Use master mixes: make different food mixes or bases that can freeze and then add to meals as you need them (beef, onion, peppers & tomato mix can be used for sloppy joes, spaghetti sauce, chili...)

- Slow cooker menu items allow you to have your meal ready at a set time, with little prep at the end of your day.
- Look for different ways to prepare the same foods so your meals don't get boring: vary salad ingredients or cooking method etc...
- Make healthy substitutions to a favourite recipe by:
Substituting brown rice instead of white
Using whole grain or whole wheat pastas, breads
Adding legumes like beans or lentils to dishes
Reducing salt & adding flavour with herbs & spices
- Create a recipe file with your favourite dishes.
- Once your menu is planned & you have checked for items on hand make an organized SHOPPING LIST.



2. SMART SHOPPING

BENEFITS OF A SHOPPING LIST:

- Helps you remember ALL the items needed for your menu plan
- Helps you stay within your BUDGET.
- Saves you TIME in the store.
- Allows you to end someone else to do you shopping.



MONEY SAVING SHOPPING TIPS

- If possible, shop at the larger grocery stores, smaller specialized stores and convenience stores are usually more expensive.
- Just because an item is "in the flyer" doesn't always mean it's on sale.
- Don't shop when you are hungry or in a hurry & stressed, shop alone.



- Try and shop only once a week and STICK TO YOUR GROCERY LIST. Getting everything you need in ONE trip will eliminate costly trips to the corner store.
- Shop around the edges of the store first, this is where you will find the BASICS; fruit & vegetables, milk products, grain products, meats.
- Get to know prices so you can recognize a "good deal" Keep a PRICE BOOK (a little notebook or card) to record the prices of items you purchase often. That way you will know if an advertised special is a true bargain.
- If the food item on sale in not there, ask for a RAIN CHECK, they are usually good for a month.
- LOOK HIGH & LOW: Items at eye level are often more expensive than those on the higher or lower shelves.

- Use the UNIT PRICING labels to compare the price per gram or ml of the same product.
- Buy NO NAME or STORE BRAND: you will get the same nutritional value for a lower price.
- END of ISLE display items are not always on sale.
- Buying from BULK stores saves you packaging costs and allows you to buy as much or as little as you need, especially for herbs, spices, nuts & seeds, whole grains, flours, pastas & dried fruit.
- Buy the freshest possible, check the BEST BEFORE DATE.
- If your budget allows & you have the space: stock up on great deals for non-perishables that can be stored or frozen.
- No matter how good the deal seems, don't buy it if you won't use it, that includes Buy One Get One BOGO sales.
- Beware of QUANTITY PRICING: The savings listed can be misleading & remember, often you can still buy just one
- READ THE LABEL on foods to see WHAT you are buying.
- If you collect Air Miles, redeem them for Sobeys gift certificates.
- Consider joining or starting a Food Purchasing Club or a Collective Kitchen in your community



GROCERY SAVINGS TIPS:

- Buy produce IN SEASON for the best quality & price.
- Shop at Thrift Stores like Needs for cheaper prices on bread.
- Unsweetened cereals cost less than pre-sweetened, choose whole grain cereals for maximum nutritional value.
- Buy the largest milk container you can use before the Best Before Date. Milk can be frozen but powdered milk is the cheapest.
- Buy low fat yogurt in large containers, buying pre portioned yogurt is more expensive. Yogurt can be frozen too, make great popsicles.
- Frozen veggies are just as healthy if not more than fresh.
- Cheaper cuts of meat can be cooked slowly in a crock pot or marinated to



tenderize. Low fat content makes them healthier too. You can buy medium or regular ground beef & drain the fat.

- Breaded meat, chicken or fish or those packaged with sauces are more expensive than buying plain. Try a healthier DIY recipe.
- Buy lean sandwich meat at the deli counter vs in packages. Avoid mock meats like bologna, salami etc.. and buy only what you need.
- Buy day old bread & freeze it, taking out slices as needed. Buy whole grain breads making sure to read the label to confirm.
- Buy blocks of cheese on sale and shred your own vs buying it shredded. Cheese can be frozen if you are using it for cooking.
- Cut your own vegetables or fruit versus buying pre cut.



- Buy 100% juice concentrate and mix in the water yourself vs buying premixed juices.
- Frozen dinners are often more expensive than homemade & most often they are much in fat & salt.
- Avoid buying processed snack foods, they are some of the most expensive foods in the store, plus you often pay extra for taxes..

FOOD STORING TIPS:

Spoiled food wastes money.....store your food safely:

- When you are shopping choose dairy and meat products last so they stay cool longer, especially in the summer.
- Wrap meats in plastic bags (from the produce dept.) in the store to prevent cross contamination of juices onto your other groceries.
- Once you are home, store meats on the bottom shelf of your fridge with a plate or tray underneath to prevent meat juices dripping onto other foods.
- Uncooked meat, poultry and fish can be kept up in the fridge up to 3 days after packaging date. Otherwise they should be well wrapped and frozen.
- If you are buying “reduced” meats, use that day or freeze immediately
- Processed meats are good for 3-4 days once they are open.
- Buy smaller amounts of fruit or vegetables that spoil quickly
- Use a clip to seal in freshness with cereal & cracker bags.
- Freeze your loaf of bread and take out what you need daily.
- Store nuts & seeds in the fridge or freezer, the oil in them can go rancid if left at room temperature too long.
- Store extra spices in your freezer, don't store them beside the stove.
- Do not leave leftovers on the counter longer than 2 hours before refrigeration. Leftovers can be kept for 2-3 days.
- Label containers of extra soup, spaghetti sauce etc.. before putting them in the freezer.
- Do not leave food in open cans, put contents into a sealed container and refrigerate.
- To prevent food poisoning, never thaw frozen foods at room temperature, thaw in the fridge. Thaw meat in the fridge or in a sink filled with cold water or in the microwave if you plan to eat it right away.
- Do not wash fresh fruit & vegetables before storing, they will last longer. But **always** wash them before using.

