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Eat Healthy While Saving Money

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These days everyone is looking for ways to save money and cutting food costs is no exception. Many people have the misconception that fast food is the cheapest and healthy food is downright expensive. But the truth is, anyone can save money and eat healthy at the same time. It just takes a little preparation, some fresh thinking, and you're on your way to an affordable healthy diet. Here are my top 7 tips for eating healthy while saving money:

1. Buy whole grains. Bags of brown rice, quinoa, or any other whole grains cost you a couple dollars and will stretch to make dozens of meals without spoiling before you can use them. Try cooking whole grains plain and storing them in the refrigerator. You can add plain grains to fruit and nuts for a quick breakfast, or add fresh or frozen vegetables, a protein, and fresh herbs and spices for affordable lunches or dinners throughout the week. Whole grains are also among the [foods that lower cholesterol](#).

2. Buy canned or dried beans. Beans are a perfect healthy substitute for meat. An extensive [study](#) published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in 2009 found that "redirecting your food dollars from meat to beans...could save some serious cash and improve your diet at the same time." As with whole grains, beans are very inexpensive and can easily be added to salads, soups, or paired with whole grains to make complete meals that won't break your budget.

3. Buy frozen fruits and vegetables. Fruits and veggies in the freezer section are frozen within hours of being picked at their peak freshness and nutritional content. But the best part is they are often much cheaper than the "fresh" items. You can buy frozen produce in bulk, save a few dollars, and pull them out of the freezer whenever you get around to it. Try using frozen fruits in smoothies, cereal, or in desserts. Try adding frozen veggies to make stir-fry meals, stews, soups, lasagna, etc.

4. Buy whole meats (such as whole chickens or shrimps with the tail left on). I generally advise reducing your meat intake to save you money and trips to the doctor. But if/when you do eat meat, try purchasing a whole chicken, for example. The more time your grocery store or market spends on preparing your food, the more dollars you're going to pay as the customer. If you buy a whole chicken, it's easier to justify spending the money on organic/free-range/antibiotic-free/hormone-free meat. Cutting up the meat yourself takes time and effort but it can equate to BIG savings for your family meals. You can always freeze the leftover portions to use at a later date.

5. Learn to love bulk foods. Look for bulk bins at your local grocery store. You can stock up on foods like whole grains, dried fruit, and nuts and avoid paying for the expensive packaging that's included in the price of the boxed items on the regular shelves. Bulk foods are typically some of the healthiest, whole food options as well. Staying in the bulk food section helps you avoid over-processed foods laden with chemicals and preservatives.

6. Visit your local farmer's market. Food from local producers is often cheaper because the prices don't include big shipping costs that you see at the large grocery chains. Local produce is also in-season, so it's plentiful and priced to sell that day. Try to educate yourself on the prices for your favorite produce at the supermarket so you can compare costs when you're browsing at the farmer's market.

7. Try vegetarian dishes on your favorite restaurant menu. When you do go out to eat, check out the vegetarian fare offered on the menu. Not only are they typically lower in calories, they are often the most inexpensive items on the menu.

Remember that eating healthy helps your body stay strong, improves your quality of life, and prevents trips to the doctor and costly prescription medications. That's a mouthful of savings.



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