

Meal Planning on a Budget

Healthy eating is important at every age and can be done on a budget. Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives. When deciding what to eat or drink, choose options that are full of nutrients and limited in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Start with these tips for creating a budget-friendly meal plan.

Use What you Already Have First!

Know what you have, check your pantry, fridge and freezer. Use the oldest items first to reduce food waste.

Plan Your Meals

Look at the week ahead to see how many meals you'll need, and how much time you have for food preparation. Review grocery store ads and coupons to incorporate items that are available on sale or special into your eating plan.

Preplanning and making meals from scratch is more cost effective than purchasing ready-made foods. Utilizing leftovers creatively to minimize waste and save food dollars.

Make a Shopping List

Make a list and stick to it to avoid overbuying and impulse purchases. Write down what you need, including details and amounts. Note any discounts you expect. Be ready to swap items if they are out of stock or if you find cheaper options.

Choose Generic Brands Over Name Brands

You will notice many generic store brands compared to name brand foods still taste great! Take advantage of store brands, which are often more affordable and nutritionally similar.

Compare Cost of Similar Products

Locate the "unit price" on the shelf sticker near the item price. Compare different brands and sizes for the best money-saving option, use the unit price rather than the total price to find the best value.

Buy in Bulk

Save money by buying larger quantities of foods that store well such as dry pastas, canned or dried beans, frozen fruit and vegetables, low or no sodium added canned vegetables and no added sugar canned fruit. Don't overbuy food that you will throw out later.

Prioritizing Nutrients

Focus on nutrient-dense foods to maintain long-term health, as they provide essential vitamins, minerals, lean protein, healthy fats and whole grain carbohydrates. Aim to

include all these nutrients for balanced meals. Adjust portion sizes based on your activity levels and nutrition and health goals. Limit empty calories, high sodium, high sugar and processed foods. Spend your money on food that nourishes your body.

Batch Cooking

I know you may not have much time to cook from scratch, try batch cooking to prepare multiple meals. Make 2 meatloaves, freeze one, large pot of tomato sauce or soup to freeze for another meal. Batch cooking can save time, energy and money.

Storing Food Properly Also Saves Money

Limit food waste. When whole fruits or vegetables on the counter get ripe, transfer them to the fridge to extend their life by a few days. When food in the fridge isn't eaten soon, transfer to an airtight, freezer-safe container or re-sealable bag. Store in the freezer for 3-6 months. Lightly steam or blanch fresh vegetables before freezing.

Avoid Impulse Buying

Take advantage of online ordering with either pick up or delivery services.

Spinach and Potato Egg Bake, 2-4 Servings

Ingredients:

1 potato, peeled and cubed	1-2 c. fresh spinach, chopped
1 T. butter	6 eggs
3/4 tsp onion powder	1/4 tsp garlic powder
1/3 cup water or milk	Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
- Prepare pie plate by coating with butter or spry oil.
- Preheat skillet over medium heat. Melt butter, then add potatoes to skillet. Cook until potatoes are brown; flip cook other side until brown, cook about 8 more minutes until potatoes are done.
- Add spinach, cook until wilted. Set aside.
- In a medium bowl, whisk together 6 eggs, onion and garlic powders, water or milk and salt, pepper to taste.
- Spread potatoes and spinach in the bottom of the pie plate. Pour egg mixture on top.

Bake for about 20 minutes until eggs are puffed and set

References: <https://eatwellspendsmart.com/cheap-meal-plan-for-two/> heart.org/healthyforgood,
<https://www.myplate.gov/tip-sheet/eat-healthy-budget>, www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/cooking-skills/shopping/shop-smart-and-save

Written by Laurie Zirilli, registered dietitian, contract RD for Oneida County Office for the Aging. Oneida County OFA provides nutrition counseling and education for the aging. Questions about services and programs for older adults and caregivers, including the Senior Nutrition Program, should call Oneida County Office for the Aging at (315) 798-5456.