



Eating Healthfully on a Budget (It's Never a Good Time to Hedge Your Health)

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in Present Magazine, December 2008

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Given the economic trough we're currently in, people are cutting back on just about everything, and rightfully so. Money is tight for many, and one of the first places people trim spending is on the grocery bill. But too often, we cut back on nourishing foods we should be eating more of. Uncertainty can cause stress and anxiety and this is not the time to shortchange our diet nutritionally, as eating well calms, soothes, and alleviates stress.

We all know that Wonder Bread costs less than whole grain bread and that Cocoa Puffs cost less than whole grain cereals. It's important to remember that eating cheap, processed food void of nutrition may be good for the pocketbook, but doing so puts our wellbeing in a deficit.

Opportunity Awaits

A budget crunch is an opportunity to get creative and resourceful, activities that cost nothing! It's a chance to get familiar with new foods and new ways to prepare foods. A surefire way to spend too much is by purchasing processed and packaged foods. You're paying for not only the processing, but also the slick and shiny boxes and bags. If this weren't enough of a rip off, many of these foods often represent empty calories, offering flavor with no nutritional value. That is why it's so easy to eat that whole bag of chips.

You're better off sticking primarily to the periphery and the bulk sections of the store. This is where you'll find "whole" foods, the foods that are unprocessed and in their natural state. Granted, you won't be able to toss these items in the microwave for an instant meal, but this is where the opportunity comes in. With time and good planning, you'll become a pro at throwing together good meals in a flash.

More tips for saving at the supermarket:

- Make a list and stick to it.
- Buy more foods in bulk, especially beans, lentils, grains, and nuts. (Grains and dried beans double or triple in size when cooked and can be prepared in large quantities and frozen.)
- Look for the leanest cuts of meat.
- When a product you normally buy is on sale, stock your pantry.
- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables when they're in season.
- During the growing season, shop at a local farmer's market.
- Limit your trips to once a week, which decreases overall spending (and saves gas money).
- Use coupons. It's hip to clip!

HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables, which keep a long time, are a healthy and very economical choice when they aren't in season. It's important to note that often, quality frozen and canned produce is packaged not long after harvesting, offering better nutritional value than the "fresh" produce that was harvested prematurely, warehoused, and then shipped to the store.

A Good Investment

One of the biggest conundrums right now for the healthy shopper is to buy organic or not to buy organic. But it doesn't have to be all or nothing. Fruits and vegetables carry different pesticide loads and produce raised conventionally is a very acceptable choice in many cases.

The Environmental Working Group has established the "Dirty Dozen," listing the produce they suggest always be purchased organically (www.foodnews.org). They are: peaches, apples, sweet bell peppers, celery, nectarines, strawberries, cherries, lettuce, imported grapes, pears, spinach, and potatoes. And, based on my research, I would add raspberries and blueberries to this list.

While it's true that organics cost a little more, I believe the risk of pesticide-laden foods makes spending a little more entirely worth it. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, M.D. and founder of the Program in Integrative Medicine in Arizona, "...their cost per pound may be quite reasonable when compared to that of some snack foods and some prepared foods. And, they're much better for you."

Winter Squash and Millet

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 small acorn squash, peeled and cubed
- 3 cups millet
- 8-inch piece kombu (seaweed)
- 7 ½ cups water
- 1 TB olive oil

Saute onion until golden brown. Add squash. Saute together for three minutes. Add millet and kombu. Add water and bring to boil. Cover and simmer for 45 min. When done, add olive oil and mix together.

From *The Energy Balance Diet*, by Joshua Rosenthal