

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension Family Nutrition Program



# DINING ON A DIME

## *Eating Better for Less*



### Cooking on a Budget –

Advice from the 2003 to 2010 issues of the newsletter  
*Dining on a Dime: Eating Better for Less*,  
by Erin Henry and Mary Meck Higgins,  
available at <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/p.aspx?tabid=91>

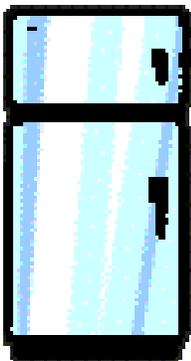
### Preparing and Eating More Meals at Home

- Just by eating one or two fewer meals at restaurants each week, you could save a whole day's worth of calories — and save time and money too. Each adult in the U.S. buys a meal or a snack from a restaurant 5.8 times per week, on average, according to the National Restaurant Association. The costs for those can add up fast!
- Instead of eating out often, enjoy more meals at home. Feature fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy foods.
- If you have a hectic schedule, look for inexpensive foods when shopping at the grocery store that you can easily use to pack your own “meals-to-go,” and for foods to make quick meals to serve at home. Buy few packaged beverages and processed foods.



### Do-It-Yourself Frozen Dinners

- § Frozen dinners can be a convenient alternative to a homemade meal on busy days when there isn't time to cook from scratch. But processed frozen dinners from the grocery store can be expensive and are usually high in fat and sodium.
- § A better alternative is to prepare homemade frozen dinners. All you need is a freezer.
- § When you are preparing a main dish, it takes only a little more effort and time to make enough for several meals. You can either freeze all of the prepared food in meal size packages, or you can serve part of the food immediately and freeze the rest for later use.

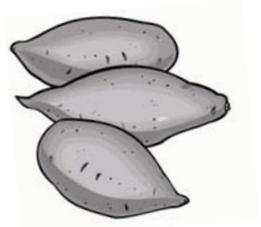
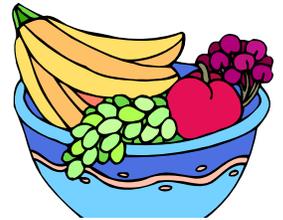


- \$ Freeze these extra servings and eat them on days when your time is short or your energy is low. This will decrease the temptation to eat out or to buy expensive convenience foods.
- \$ For tips on foods that do not freeze well, download the brochure at the website:  
<http://muextension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/hesguide/foodnut/gh1501.pdf>

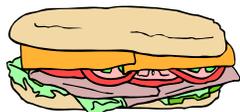
## Frugal Foods: Spending Less, Getting More!

Our “top 10” list of frugal foods combines great taste while packing a nutritious punch. All of these foods are versatile — try them for breakfast, lunch, supper and snacks.

- ✪ Apples and Bananas. A perfect on-the-go snack, both apples and bananas are naturally portable. Eat these satisfying and sweet nutritional powerhouses raw or baked, or add them to salads, desserts and baked goods.
- ✪ Beans. Full of antioxidants, dietary fiber and protein, canned beans cost about 23 cents per serving. Dry varieties that you cook yourself cost even less. Keep them on hand to pack into brownbag lunches and to make quick suppers.
- ✪ Brown Rice. With a slightly nutty taste, brown rice is a whole grain. It is more nutritious than white rice. Serve as a side dish, at breakfast or as a snack with cinnamon and milk, or add to casseroles and soups.
- ✪ Canned Tomatoes. Canned tomatoes make a great base for countless main dishes, dips, sauces, soups, stews and chili. Tomatoes are rich in vitamin C and lycopene. Buy them without added salt if possible.
- ✪ Canned Tuna. A versatile addition to sandwiches, salads and casseroles, tuna is high in protein and vitamin D, and low in calories and fat.
- ✪ Eggs. Costing usually less than \$2 for a dozen, eggs are high in protein. Boiled, fried or scrambled — eggs cook quickly, so they’re perfect for breakfast, lunch or supper. For variety, try French toast, huevos rancheros or egg salad.
- ✪ Fat-free Milk. A natural convenience food, skim milk offers a healthy dose of vitamin D, calcium, protein and potassium. Serve skim milk with meals and snacks, and use in soups, smoothies and desserts.
- ✪ Kale. At about a dollar a bunch, kale is one of the least costly green vegetables you’ll find. Three ways to quickly serve kale are to: Serve it hot after pan-frying with garlic and a small amount of vegetable oil; Steam and add to pasta salads or as a topping on homemade pizza.
- ✪ Potatoes. White and sweet potatoes are satisfying and are high in dietary fiber, vitamin C and potassium. Bake, boil, roast, pan-fry or oven-fry them, or add to casseroles or soups.
- ✪ Rolled Oats. At just 14 cents, one cup of cooked oats is a heart-healthy whole grain with 4 grams of dietary fiber. Cook oats with fruit for a breakfast or snack, or add them to baked goods.



## Planning to Save by Planning Menus



- ◆ Plan seven days of menus every week. Check your schedule, and write down what you plan to serve for each meal and snack. Plan to cook on the days when you'll have more time. Plan to pack “meals-to-go” or to serve quick meals at home, such as an item you can reheat from your stash in the freezer, or cold sandwiches, on busy days. Remember to plan to use left-overs, too.
- ◆ Focus on items you already have on hand, especially the perishable foods in your refrigerator. Then add meals that are based on specials, sales and coupons in newspaper, radio and TV ads, especially the meat and produce sales.
- ◆ Buy enough of each sale item to prepare several meals. For example, if the grocery store is selling tuna at a lower-than-usual price, you might decide to serve tuna casserole and tuna salad sandwiches that week. Or, if ground hamburger is on sale, perhaps you could buy enough to make spaghetti with meat sauce, tacos and a meatloaf.
- ◆ Keep your menus for future use.



## Making Less-Meat Meals



- \$ Add plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grains (such as whole wheat bread or pasta, oats or another whole grain cereal, or brown rice) to the meal.
- \$ Vary your protein food choices. Choose from cooked dried beans and peas, nuts, seeds, low-fat dairy products, eggs and modest portions of seafood, skinless poultry (chicken, turkey) and lean red meats (beef, pork, lamb). Most Americans eat more animal protein than they need, but not as many cooked dried beans and peas as are recommended. Since meats are usually the most expensive portion of a meal, using smaller portions of seafood, red meats and poultry also helps stretch your food dollars.
- \$ Preparing meatless main dishes, such as those using beans or lentils, can save a family of four about \$3.00 per meal.
- \$ For less-meat and meat-less recipe ideas, visit the websites:
  - \* <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/p.aspx?tabid=216>
  - \* <http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/>
  - \* Vegetarian Resource Group — [www.vrg.org/index.htm](http://www.vrg.org/index.htm)
  - \* Vegetarian Kitchen — [www.vegkitchen.com/recipes.htm](http://www.vegkitchen.com/recipes.htm)
  - \* Recipe America — <http://recipeamerica.com/recipes/vegetarian.php>



## Wasting Less Food – Why and How:

We throw away 14 percent of the food bought in the U.S. That adds up to about \$1,000 to \$2,000 a year for an average family of four! (The range depends on whether the family uses a thrifty food plan or a more liberal one, and is based on Sep. 2008 food prices).

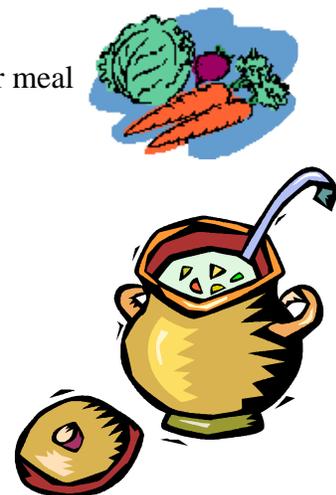


### Plan:

- Plan meals focusing on using foods you already have in your refrigerator.
- Plan to buy a little less of refrigerated perishable foods than you think your family will eat before it spoils. Instead, buy a few extra non-perishable foods. For example, buy the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables that you can eat within a day or two. Buy dried, canned or frozen fruits and vegetables to use until you shop again.
- Plan portion sizes based on nutrition guidelines, especially for the more expensive food items in your meals.
- Plan for “planned-overs.” Make your menu do double duty. You will sometimes have more product than a recipe calls for. Have a plan for using these foods, such as the extra half can of some food. For instance, you could add them to a soup, or possibly freeze them for later use. Be creative in using leftovers.

### Do the “food patrol”:

- Avoid buying perishable foods that aren’t in your menu plan. Or, adjust your meal plan if you do buy perishables that you didn’t originally plan to get.
- Forgotten food is more likely to spoil. Check your refrigerator and pantry daily for perishable foods that need to be used soon.
- Serve foods before they spoil. Or, if possible, preserve perishable items by freezing them.
- Serve foods such as fresh bread, fruits and vegetables that are just a little past their best quality in creative ways. Examples are: Make stale bread into croutons to top a salad. Cut up mushy bananas and spongy apples and add them to muffin recipes. Chop rubbery carrots and boil with spaghetti sauce. You can boil most vegetables and add them to soup.
- Throw away spoiled food.



For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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