



Eating on a Budget

Trying to eat healthfully while also managing a monthly budget can be overwhelming. It can be even more stressful when starting a new therapeutic food plan. A lot of people think that eating healthfully requires a lot of money, but it doesn't have to. In fact, it is possible to save money and eat healthfully if you plan out your budget, meals, and shopping trips in advance. Below are some tips to help you plan and shop.

Before you shop...

Figure out your weekly schedule and budget. Plan ahead if you know you will be eating out or making a meal for others.

Look through your pantry, fridge, cupboards, and freezers. Make a list of the food you already have that you can use for the coming week.

Look through your sales ads and weekly flyers to learn what foods are on sale at different grocery stores in your area. Keep an eye out for sales on specialty products like organic meats and dairy, which can be consumed during the week or frozen for later use.

Plan all of your meals for the week, using the information above as a starting point. Look for recipes that utilize ingredients you already have on hand, or ingredients you know are on sale.

Make a grocery list with any additional ingredients you will need for the recipes you've chosen. Be sure to include food for breakfasts and lunches, plus any used pantry ingredients you need to replace.

If you receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), make sure your grocery store and/or farmers market accepts benefits. Some will match your dollars spent on produce up to \$10, allowing you to buy twice as much.

Consult the Environmental Working Group's Clean 15 and Dirty Dozen lists. Use these lists to prioritize which foods you will buy organic vs. conventional. Clean 15 foods have little pesticide residue when raised conventionally and are safe to consume. Dirty Dozen foods have the most pesticide residue when raised conventionally, so they should be purchased organic when possible.

Have a snack. Going to the grocery store while you're hungry makes impulse purchases more likely.

In the store...

Only buy foods that are on your grocery list.

Buy generic or store brand items when possible.

When buying shelf-stable goods, look on the bottom shelves for less expensive options. Stores tend to stock the most expensive options at eye level.

Avoid packaged and processed foods when possible. Premium packaging often contributes to the higher cost of these items.

Buy fruits and vegetables while they are in season. Seasonal produce is usually more flavorful and less expensive. In-season produce is often priced to sell before it goes bad.

Buy frozen produce as an alternative to fresh. Produce is frozen at the height of freshness, and most of the nutrient content remains intact. When possible, stock up on affordable frozen produce and save it for weeks when money is tighter.

Buy in bulk. Spices and dry goods (rice, beans, grains, nuts, flours, etc.) are significantly cheaper in the bulk section. You can buy as much or as little as you need, depending on your storage space and budget.

Skip the interior aisles stocked with chips, snacks, candy, and soda. These items are expensive, provide little to no nutrition, and will not fill you up for long. Instead, do most of your shopping on the perimeter of the store, where produce, meats, and dairy products are located.