



## Including Nutrient-Dense Foods on a Budget

If the budget for food seems to be getting smaller and smaller, that doesn't mean we have to forget about health and nutritional quality. With planning and preparation, nutrient-dense foods can still be included on the grocery list; nutritional quality doesn't have to be sacrificed.

### Shop Smart

Rice and pasta are budget-friendly grain options, especially when purchased in bulk. Choose whole wheat pasta and brown rice for whole grain options that pack more of a nutritional punch, with more fiber and B vitamins compared to their white counterparts. Hot cereals like plain oatmeal and whole grain dry cereal can also be purchased in bulk. It's important to note this is only cheaper if we use all the product before it needs to be thrown away. Buying bigger will not save money if some of it ends up in the trash. You know what will work best for you and your family!

To lower meat costs, buy the family-sized or value pack and freeze what you won't immediately use in the next few days. Plant-based protein options can also be cost-effective and provide less saturated fat compared to animal products. Some examples include dried or canned peas, lentils, and beans such as kidney beans, lima beans, and garbanzo beans (chickpeas). If able, try to purchase cans that have "no added salt" or "low

sodium" on the front of the package. If you're unable to find this at your local grocery store, regular cans can still be used. Drain and rinse the contents prior to eating it to help get rid of some of the added sodium. Other protein options like seafood don't have to cost a fortune. Try buying packets or cans of tuna, salmon, or sardines. Dairy products can also be a good option for getting protein. Instead of buying single serving containers of yogurt, buy the larger container and scoop out what you need each time you eat it. Try buying plain for less added sugar, and add your own fruit, granola, or honey for sweetness.

### Incorporating Budget-Friendly Produce

Buy in season produce; this often costs less and is at peak flavor. Buy only what can be used before it spoils. If you have the freezer space, stock up on plain frozen vegetables. Choose those without added sauces or butter. Canned fruits and vegetables can be very cost effective, with most 15-oz cans costing less than one dollar.

As mentioned earlier, look at cans that have "no added salt" or "low sodium" on the front of the package. Fruits canned in a heavy syrup will have more sugar and calories added to them; focus on fruits that are canned in water or in their own juice.



### Plan Ahead

Plan meals for the week ahead of time and create a grocery list based on your budget that includes both staples and perishables. Check what's on sale at your local store by looking at their

weekly ad; plan meals for the week around these sale items. Make sure to check your fridge and pantry before you go to see what you may already have to prevent you from buying an ingredient you don't need. Sometimes it can help to organize the list by grocery aisle or food group to help you move quickly through the store and prevent you from buying more that wasn't on your list and spending more than you intended. When you're in the store, compare similar products. Store brands are often slightly cheaper than name brands.

Sometimes similar foods are sold in different sizes, which makes it tough to truly compare their prices. Comparing the unit price of items is the best way to determine which is a better deal. Instead of focusing on the overall price, this focuses on the cost of a "unit" of that food (which could be a serving, ounce, or pound, for example). Most grocery store shelves will have the price per ounce listed. In case the unit price isn't listed, here is how to calculate it on your own. Let's look at two cans of chicken noodle soup. The first can is 19 ounces and costs \$2.69. The second can is 10.5 ounces and costs \$1.99. By dividing the cost of the product by the number of ounces, you get the price per unit.

	Can 1	Can 2
Price	\$2.69	\$1.99
Unit size	19 ounces	10.5 ounces
Price per unit	\$0.14 per ounce	\$0.19 per ounce

After a little bit of math, we can see that the first can is cheaper than the second smaller can when comparing the cost per ounce!

## Food Assistance Programs

If further assistance is needed to help with getting access to nutritious foods, there are multiple programs available that you may be eligible for:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly known as food stamps)- program based on income eligibility where benefits are provided monthly on an electronic card that is accepted at most grocery stores.
- The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program- offers food vouchers and nutrition services (including nutrition education) for medically or nutritionally at-risk infants and children up to age 5, as well as pregnant, breastfeeding or bottle feeding but recently postpartum women.
- Meals on Wheels program- services typically are provided to adults age 60+ and can include individuals in need who are homebound or unable to prepare meals. Cost is determined on what clients can afford.
- Local food pantries- provide food to income eligible individuals on a regular basis (typically monthly). On the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's website, hit the green "Find Food" button in the top-right corner to find food banks nearest you.

**To schedule an appointment with a Registered Dietitian, please obtain a referral for Medical Nutrition Therapy and contact:**

*Presbyterian: 412-692-4497*

*Shadyside: 412-623-2421*