Now More Than Ever, USDA’s Nutrition Assistance Programs Can Help

Many families are concerned about the rising cost of food. Read on for tips on how to stretch your food dollars through budgeting, food selection, and low-cost recipes. If you are struggling to put food on the table, USDA’s nutrition assistance programs may help.

Resources: Available For Food

- Know how much money you have to spend on food.
- Make a shopping list based on the money you have to spend.
- Buy only the amounts of fresh foods you can use before it spoils.
- Consider frozen or shelf stable items that last longer.

Planning: Making Meals With Foods On Hand

Before going to the grocery store, check what foods you already have.

Once you know what foods you have, ask these questions:

- What meals and recipes can I make using the foods I have?
- Can I mix foods together to make a tasty and nutritious meal?
- Which foods do my family need for good health?
- Plan what recipes you will make using your list of foods.

- Use other foods on your list such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains to complete the menu.
- Once you plan your menus, make a new list for missing foods you need to buy.

~Turn the page for more tips on low-cost, healthy shopping.
Look for bargains on day old bread. It costs less but is still nutritious.

Fruits and vegetables are usually less expensive when they are in season. Farmer's Markets always carry what is in season.

**Tips: Best Buys for Cost and Nutrition**

**Breads and Grains**
- Look for bargains on day old bread. It costs less but is still nutritious.
- Buy regular rice, oatmeal, and grits instead of instant to save on money, sugar, and calories.

**Vegetables and Salad**
- Buy large bags of frozen vegetables. Seal tightly in the freezer between uses.
- Avoid pre-bagged salad mixes. They are usually more expensive and spoil faster.

**Fruits**
- Buy fresh fruits in season when they generally cost less.
- Frozen and canned fruits are a smart choice all year round.

**Low-Fat Milk Products**
- Buy fresh, low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese in the largest size that can be used before spoiling.
- Larger containers cost less than smaller sizes.
- Ultra-pasteurized milk has a longer expiration date and won’t spoil as fast.

**Meat and Beans**
- Dried beans and peas are a good source of protein and fiber. They last a long time without spoiling.
- Chuck or bottom round roast has less fat and is cheaper than sirloin.

**Shopping: Before, During, and After**

**Before Shopping**
- Make a shopping list. This helps you stick to your budget.
- Plan your meals. Planning helps put leftovers to good use.
- Look for coupons, sales, and store specials.
- For added savings sign up for the store discount card.

**During Shopping**
- Don’t shop when you are hungry. It’s easier to stick to your shopping list.
- Try store brands. They usually cost less.
- Compare products for the best deal.
- Check sell by dates. Buy the freshest food possible. It lasts longer.

**After Shopping**
- Store food right away to preserve freshness.
- Freeze food to prevent spoiling.
- Divide foods into small portions for children and elderly to prevent waste.
- Use foods with the earliest expiration dates first.
USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs Can Help Make Ends Meet

You may qualify for more than Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. If you get SNAP benefits and have children in school, they qualify for free lunch and breakfast. If you are low-income and pregnant, breastfeeding, a new mom or have children under five years old, you might qualify for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a Federal program that provides food to low-income persons. For more information on these programs, contact:

SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- For: Eligible low-income people and their families
- Call 1-800-221-5689
- To find your nearest SNAP office visit: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/default.htm

WIC - Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children
- For: Eligible low-income pregnant or breastfeeding women, new moms, and children under age 5

School Nutrition Programs
- For: Eligible low-income school-aged children
- Contact your local school or school district

TEFAP - The Emergency Food Assistance Program
- For: Eligible low-income persons

Resources for SNAP Partners, Educators, and the Community
The SNAP-Ed Connection is an online resource center which contains information on healthy eating, using your food dollar wisely, and over 600 low cost recipes in English and Spanish. Visit the SNAP-Ed Connection at:

http://snap.nal.usda.gov

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**Eating on a Budget — The 3 P’s**

**Plan**

- Plan meals and snacks for the week according to an established budget.
- Find quick and easy recipes online.
- Include meals that will “stretch” expensive food items (stews, casseroles, stir-fried dishes).
- Make a grocery list.
- Check for sales and coupons in the local paper or online and consider discount stores.
- Ask about a loyalty card at your grocery store.

**Purchase**

- Buy groceries when you are **not** hungry and when you are not too rushed.
- Stick to the grocery list and stay out of the aisles that don’t contain items on your list.
- Buy store brands if cheaper.
- Find and compare unit prices listed on shelves to get the best price.
- Purchase some items in bulk or as family packs which usually cost less.
- Choose fresh fruits and vegetables in season; buy canned vegetables with less salt.
- Pre-cut fruits and vegetables, individual cups of yogurt, and instant rice and hot cereal are convenient, but usually cost more than those that require a bit more prep time.
- Good low-cost items available all year include:
  - **Protein** — beans (garbanzo, black, cannellini)
  - **Vegetables** — carrots, greens, potatoes
  - **Fruit** — apples, bananas

**Prepare**

- Some meal items can be prepared in advance; pre-cook on days when you have time.
- Double or triple up on recipes and freeze meal-sized containers of soups and casseroles or divide into individual portions.
- Try a few meatless meals by substituting with beans and peas or try “no-cook” meals like salads.
- Incorporate leftovers into a subsequent meal.
- Be creative with a fruit or vegetable and use it in different ways during the week.