

SHOPPING ON A BUDGET:

STRATEGIES TO STRETCH YOUR FOOD DOLLAR

Food is essential, and understanding how to make the most of your food dollar can help fill your cart while not overspending. With a little planning and strategy, shoppers can stretch their food dollar and get the most bang for their buck. Shoppers can consider the following steps to get started.

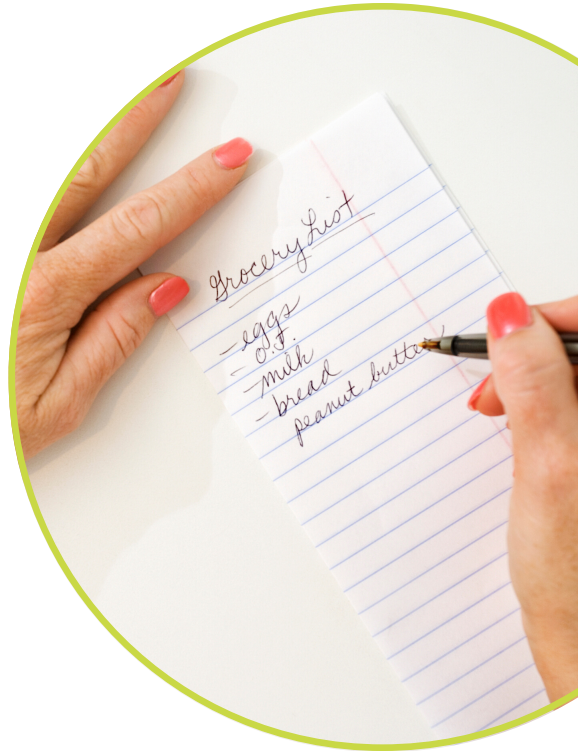
1. Budget:

First, know your budget. Determine how much you have to spend on food each week, and work from that. Extra thought and small changes to spending habits may be necessary.

2. Plan Your Weekly Meals:

Regardless of your family size, planning is key. Shopping every seven to ten days is a good option. This avoids visiting the grocery store too frequently, which can save you time. Going less frequently may lead to purchasing too much food and potential waste.

- Think about your schedule for the week; consider when you are most busy and when you have more time. Plan meals accordingly.
- Write down your meals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for each day of the week. Include snacks, too.
- Think about meals or recipes with enough servings for multiple meals. This can reduce the number of ingredients you need to buy, and save you time preparing another meal.
- Using a [meal plan worksheet](#) can help with planning.



3. Take Inventory of What You Have and Make a Grocery List:

Gather recipes, if you are using them, so you can review the ingredients needed. Then, refer to your written meal plan and recipes to make a grocery list. Before adding everything to your grocery list, look in your cabinets, refrigerator, and freezer to see what you already have. Make note of what you have on hand, as you will not need to add this to your grocery list. Organize foods on your grocery list by food groups (fruits/vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy). Foods that are part of one food group are generally in the same area in the grocery store, so this can help save time while shopping.



4. Shop Smart:

Before shopping, read the sales flyers for your grocery store and gather coupons, but use only for items that you need and know you will use. Inquire about joining a store's loyalty program to take advantage of additional sales for members. Joining these programs is free.

Read the expiration date on packaged foods and choose those with the latest expiration date, so they last longer.

Fruits and Vegetables

When buying fruits and vegetables, choose in-season produce when able. Often those that are in-season are on sale and less expensive. A seasonal produce guide may provide more guidance. Consider canned and frozen fruits and vegetables. These products are just as nutritious as fresh, often cost less, and store longer. Choose fruit canned in 100% fruit juice and vegetables with "low-sodium" or "no salt added" on the label.

Protein Foods and Grains

Canned or dried beans and lentils; canned fish like tuna, salmon, and sardines; and eggs are all low-cost and healthy protein foods. Whole grain pastas, brown rice, corn meal, and whole oats are all budget- friendly whole grains. Check ingredient lists and pick the items that have a whole grain listed first.

Dairy

Choose low- fat or fat-free milk. They provide just as much calcium, but fewer calories than whole and 2% milk. If you enjoy yogurt, buy the larger size of low-fat plain yogurt instead of individual flavored yogurt. Then add your own flavors by mixing in fruits. Not only does it cost less, but also eliminates added sugars.

Understand Prices Before Purchasing:

The price tag shown on the grocery shelf or bin includes helpful information, and understanding what this means can help you save money.

- The price you pay for an item is called the retail price.
- The price an item costs per pound, ounce, quart, etc. is called the unit price.

The unit price is helpful in comparing two items. The unit price is listed next to the retail price in smaller print, highlighted in a yellow or red box. Look at this price to compare two items. For example, say one yogurt costs \$1.62 for 32 oz., and the **unit price is \$0.05 per oz.** The second yogurt costs \$0.72 for 6 oz., but the **unit price is \$0.12 per oz.** Based on the unit price, you can determine that the larger, 32 oz. yogurt is the better buy because you are getting more for your money.

With a little planning and strategy, shoppers can stretch their food dollar to get the most for their money.

