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Grocery Store Stress!

By Wendy Rice, Family and Consumer Science Agent, La Plata County

Do you get frustrated at the time it takes to go to the grocery store, the cost, and the stress? It is such a busy place and it always costs more than planned. According to Department of Labor's latest survey, we spend an average of 10% of our household income on food. It also finds that consumers with lower incomes spend a higher amount of their income on groceries (19-25%). Of that about 60% of every dollar is spent for food eaten at home and 40% for food eaten away from home.

A few basic planning steps can help save money every week and cut down your time in the store. Planning also helps reduce stress, and increase the quality of meals. It's all about eating smart and planning your meals! Challenge yourself to try meal planning for just four weeks. The more planning you do, the easier meal planning and food budgeting will be. Start planning with a few guiding principles:

- Fill your plate with more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and less meat.
 - The more color on the plate the better. Add color by varying your fruits and vegetables
 - The less processed the food the better. Processed foods tend to be high in salt, sugar and/or fat.
 - Increase the amount of whole grains. Whole grains are a great source of fiber.
1. **Decide how much money you can afford for one month of food.** Perhaps start by identifying 15% of your income for food. Divide that amount by 4 to determine amount available per week. This gives you a structure. Some people find that putting that amount of cash into an envelope (for grocery store and eating out) helps to create some control on amount spent for food.
 2. **Decide on meals your family needs for one week.** Start with a rough outline of meals to be prepared at home. This can be as easy as asking family members for foods they would like to eat for the upcoming week. Typically it is easiest to start with the main dish for supper. From there, insert grains, fruits and vegetables to compliment the chosen main dish. Think in terms of color and variety to make healthy choices. Using a blank calendar page, identify what meals and snacks are needed for each day and for each household member. Pick foods you and your family like and build a meal plan around them. Look at grocery store fliers and consider meals that use foods which are on sale. Try to identify at least four evening meals for



the week with leftover surprise the other two nights. The less processed your choices are, the higher the nutrient value will be. Less processed foods also lower the cost of your meal. By having a menu posted on your fridge, it removes frustration at dinner time. Decisions were made when you were not tired or rushed. The grocery store trip was built around this menu so the ingredients are ready and waiting.

- 3. Create your shopping list.** After you have gone through the pantry, note items you need to buy. By having a shopping list, you save time and money. A list also decreases impulse purchases. A shopping list allows you to shop the outside aisles of the store. Shopping the outside of the store helps cut down on overpriced processed foods. The outside aisles of most grocery stores are where you will find items such as fruits and vegetables, dairy, meat and breads. Shop only once a week. The more trips made to the grocery store, the more money is spent on food. Don't forget to take any coupons for foods on your shopping list.



Let's Talk:

Discuss with your family their favorite foods to place on the weekly menu. Talk about selecting a variety of colored fruits and vegetables. Different colors (green, orange, purple, yellow and red) provide different nutritional benefits. Select one new fruit or vegetable to try each week. Discuss how each family member can help with food preparation. Even young children can get involved by helping wash vegetables or tear lettuce. Children can also help by setting the table or clearing dishes after a meal. Allowing children to be part of the meal preparation increases opportunities for quality family time. Many positive things can result from this simple beginning!

Recipe for Health: Vegetable Beef Soup (serves 6)

Ingredients:

- 2-3 cups cooked beef (leftovers), cut into bite size pieces
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and sliced
- 4 potatoes, washed and cubed (peeling optional)
- 3 cups of water
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can (15 ounces) diced tomatoes with liquid
- 1 can (15 ounces) green beans or green peas with liquid
- 1 can (15 ounces) whole kernel corn with liquid
- Optional seasonings: thyme, oregano, crushed red pepper flakes, marjoram, Worcestershire sauce, etc

Directions:

In a large pot sauté diced onions, celery and carrots in vegetable oil, until tender and onions are a light brown. Add water, broth, beef and seasonings. Bring to a boil. Turn heat to low. Cover pot and simmer 30 minutes. Add tomatoes, green bean or peas and corn. Simmer an additional 15 minutes. Adjust seasonings. Serve with whole grain bread or crackers, sliced fresh fruit and low fat milk.