

Healthy Eating on a Budget

Everyone is budget conscious these days, but watching your budget does not have to mean compromising your health. You can eat well, lose or maintain a healthy weight and stay within your budget, by following a few simple suggestions.

Eat more at home and less in restaurants, and find yourself eating healthier and saving money. Take advantage of locally grown seasonal fruits and vegetables available at farmer's markets and farm stands during the summer. They are fresher, healthier, and less expensive than supermarket varieties. Many local growers refuse to use chemical pesticides, contributing to your good health.

When shopping, buy large quantities of the fresh vegetables you use most. Rinse under warm water. This is especially important in ridding supermarket produce of lingering chemical pesticide residue. Blanch vegetables by plunging into boiling water for no more than a minute, then immediately plunge into ice water. Dry thoroughly. Portion out in freezer bags and place in freezer, saving time, money and contributing to your overall health and well-being.

The next time you need vegetables for dinner, grab a bag from your freezer, steam and serve. Create your own mixed vegetable packages. Broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, corn, onion and red pepper are a colorful combination that enhances every meal. Another combination might include peas, carrots, mushrooms and onions. Use your imagination and mix vegetables to your taste, being sure to use as much color as possible.

A quick, easy, healthy way to get your veggies is to cut a medium size potato into one-inch chunks, leaving their skins on. Place in a baking dish. Sprinkle olive oil, one teaspoon each, Italian seasoning, granulated garlic and chives over potatoes. Add one tablespoon reduced calorie margarine. Bake at 375° for about 45 minutes. Add one package of your fresh frozen vegetables and roast an addition fifteen minutes or until potatoes are tender and vegetables crisp.

Buy large family size packages of chicken and fish, even if your family is small or you have an empty nest. Double the yield of chicken breasts, by slicing them in half lengthwise, wrapping each in a separate piece of wrap, and freezing. Sauté chicken breasts in olive oil, a teaspoon of granulated garlic and a little reduced calorie margarine along with mushrooms and onions. Serve with your fresh frozen vegetables roasting in the oven, and you have a quick, healthy meal that rivals any restaurant, and is considerably less expensive.

Americans love their beef. Lean beef is a valuable protein when added to your diet, but beef can be expensive. Shop the sales for the best cuts and price, divide into portions and freeze. Use in stir-fry dishes along with your fresh frozen vegetables. When buying ground beef, substitute ground turkey or combine ground turkey and low fat ground beef in equal amounts, and freeze. Make a meatloaf or burgers ahead of time and freeze. When you are ready to fire up the grill, you will find everything at your fingertips in your freezer.

Americans also love pasta. Luckily, pasta is relatively inexpensive and good for us. Buying whole wheat and whole grain varieties add a nutritional punch to meals. Serve fresh frozen vegetables over pasta, top with almonds, low fat cheddar cheese chunks and enjoy a healthy, delicious, affordable meal that you created.

Don't forget those delicious summer berries. Place fresh blueberries and blackberries from your local farmer's market or farm stand in freezer bags. Rinse berries under lukewarm water, and dry thoroughly before freezing. Freeze strawberries by cutting off tops. Cut berries in half, freeze in single layers on cookie sheets, and place in freezer bags.

Taking advantage of buying and freezing fresh seasonal produce throughout the summer saves money and ensures healthy, affordable meals all winter.