

## Are Grocery Bills Eating at the Food Budget

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Americans spend about \$2,900 on food per person each year. Almost half of that money is spent on foods eaten away from home. Although many people may not think about their grocery bills or food costs, recent events in our nation's economy have caused many individuals to look for ways to curb their spending practices. For some, changing their food purchasing habits is a great place to start.

Buying food is like making an investment. Since the money spent on food is essentially unavailable for other expenses, the goal is to practice smart food purchasing skills that enable us to get the most for our food dollar investment.

The most food or the most nutrition? Both! With an estimated 70% of Americans living from paycheck to paycheck, practicing smart shopping skills can help families stretch their food dollars before they break their bank accounts. Eating out less often is definitely one way to save money. Plus, research suggests that individuals who eat foods prepared at home have more nutritious meals compared to those who eat out, so not only are you saving money, but you are improving nutrient intake as well.

Planning meals in advance, making a shopping list before going to the store, and using coupons wisely are popular tips for saving those food dollars. But here are some other tips that may be new to you:

- **Take an inventory.** Meat sales. Canned food sales. We love to shop when there is a sale!. Too often, however, we buy foods, put them away, and forget about them. Every few months, take an inventory of the foods you have in your pantry or freezer. Use these foods as a starting point for future meals.
- **Check items that are reduced for quick sale.** For example, meat that is approaching the "sell-by date" may be reduced by as much as 50%. To ensure quality and safety, use or freeze the meat immediately.
- **Get in and out of the store as quickly as possible.** Supermarket patrons spend about \$2.17 for every minute they are in the store. The longer one is in the store, the more likely it is they will spend more than what they need. Staying focused and free from distractions can help us keep our spending down. Shopping alone and during times that the store is not crowded can help shoppers maintain their focus.
- **Weight your pre-bagged produce.** Many supermarkets offer produce in 3, 5, and 10 pound bags. Weigh your bagged produce and choose the one that weighs the most. This will ensure that you are getting what you paid for.
- **Buy juice as frozen concentrate instead of ready to use bottles or cartons.** A 64-ounce container of ready-to-serve orange juice can cost as much as \$3.49 (approximate unit price per ounce = \$.05) A 16-ounce can of frozen juice concentrate sells for as little as \$1.79. Once you add 48 ounces of water to make 64 ounces, the unit price is about three cents. For maximum nutrition, be sure to purchase only 100% fruit juice.

Finally, Americans spend about 12% of their food dollars on foods that offer little

nutrition but plenty of calories. These foods include potato chips, cookies, soda, and candy. This represents more than \$200 a year for the average family. Cutting back on these purchases can certainly help trim the food budget and maybe even our waistlines. And that would certainly be a wise investment!

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