

Eating Healthy on a Budget

Purpose

To give students ideas on how to eat healthy on a budget.

Rationale

It seems like most people are tight on time these days, which can make healthy, home-cooked meals harder to come by. At the same time, many health reports indicate that meals prepared at home are healthier than packaged, processed, and fast foods. However, packaged and processed foods are usually cheaper. Healthier eating won't just help adult students feel better—it can also help them fight the obesity epidemic that affects more than one-third of the U.S., according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The poor eating habits of many in the U.S. often shock newcomers to this country.

This article gets students learning and discussing how they can make healthier, more affordable choices at the grocery store. The resources shown with this article are from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ChooseMyPlate.gov, a website focused on healthier eating and living. Make sure to check out the sidebars for additional food, health, and budget resources from ChooseMyPlate.gov and other sites.

The activities in this article could be adapted for almost any level of ESOL or basic literacy. For example, in a lower-level ESOL class, you could simplify the reading or share only some of the tips. However, the activity will work best if students have a basic familiarity with the food categories shown on the shopping list: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and proteins. It will also help if students know names in English for some of the foods that they eat within those categories. Many picture dictionaries for ESOL students devote a few pages to food and food groups.



health
literacy

More Information

The article focuses on two resources from the USDA's site ChooseMyPlate.gov. Here are other helpful links on the site.

Daily Food Plans

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/tools-daily-food-plans>

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/myplate/dailyfoodplans/PlanAndWorksheet-1600cals-18plusyrs.pdf>

The healthiest food plan for you may differ from that of your partner, colleagues, children, or students. At the first link above, you'll find various links to healthy daily food plans, with recommendations based on age, sex, and calorie limits. There is also a link to a more personalized plan. The second link above shows a sample daily 1600-calorie plan for someone who is 18 or older.

ChooseMyPlate.gov in Other Languages

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/multiple-languages>

ChooseMyPlate has a variety of resources available in Spanish as well as some in Arabic, German, Japanese, Chinese, and more.

More Information

continued from page 3

Videos

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/videos>

To make nutrition information even easier to follow, check out the series of videos available at ChooseMyPlate.

Recipes, Cookbooks, and Menus

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/recipes-cookbooks-and-menus>

<http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

Ready to get into the kitchen? Use the links above to find a variety of sample menus and cookbooks available via other government websites. One resource shown on the page that we recommend is *What's Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl* (see second link above), which has healthy, tasty recipes (pumpkin parfait and bread pudding with kale and butternut squash are two examples).

BMI Calculator

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/tools-BMI>

Users can calculate their body mass index and see if it is within healthy limits.

Just Say Yes to Fruits and Veggies

<http://jsyfruitveggies.org/>

Find a variety of recipes that include produce as well as tips for buying fruits and vegetables on a budget from this New York State-produced site.

The Basic Activity

1. **Discuss with students various questions related to the grocery store.** Ask: How often do you go to the grocery store? What do you buy there? Where else do you go for food shopping? Do you spend a lot of money? How do you save money when buying food? What do you buy that is healthy? What do you buy that might be unhealthy? Discuss these questions as a class or in small groups. If discussing in small groups, have the questions in front of the class or on handouts.
2. **Brainstorm as a class some ideas to save money while grocery shopping.** Put the ideas on the board. Ideas not shared in the reading on page 6 that could be helpful include:
 - *Shop at a local farmers market.*
 - *Leave the kids at home when food shopping.*
 - *Visit a local u-pick farm.*
 - *Look for sales.*
 - *Cut coupons from the newspaper or print them from websites.*
 - *Join a community-supported agriculture program or co-op.*
 - *Make a list and stick to it.*

Ask: Do you think you can eat healthier by doing these things? Let students know they will now do a reading on the topic of saving money while grocery shopping.

3. **Give each student a copy of the reading on page 6 of this issue.** The reading is also available on the ChooseMyPlate.gov website at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet16EatingBetterOnABudget.pdf>.

Decide in advance how difficult the reading may be for your students. You may choose to review potentially difficult vocabulary terms in advance. We have identified a few terms below, with their definitions, that you can share:

head – v. go

loyalty card – n. a card some stores give that provides savings so you will shop there more

economical – adj. less expensive

bulk – n. large amount

in season – n. foods or plants ready at a specific time of year

scratch – n. homemade

batch – n. amount of goods or food prepared at one time

leftover – n. food from a previous meal that is saved to eat later

Go through the reading as you usually might with other reading assignments.

4. **Ask students what new ideas they learned from the reading.** Are there some tips from the reading that they will try at home? What are some ideas from the article that will help them eat healthier?



5. **Let students know that you want them to make a grocery list for their next trip to the store.** As they make their lists, they should think about how to save money at the supermarket. Give each student a copy of the list on page 7 of this issue. (The list can also be used electronically by going to http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/budget/grocery_list_interactive.pdf.)

Do a quick check with students to make sure they understand the different food categories on the list. Have students write down what they plan to buy when they go to the store next. Encourage them to share their lists with partners or with you.

6. **Discuss the lists as a class.** Ask what foods they have in each category. See if the class can find food trends (for example, eggs and chicken are on most lists; mangoes are only on one or two lists). What do people plan to make with their food? Do you always make a list before going to the store?

Encourage students to go home and complete their lists and then use the lists at the supermarket.

7. **When students return to class, ask if they used their lists at the grocery store.** Were the lists helpful? Would they use them again? What new things are students trying at home now to save money on their food budget? Can anyone say if they saved money in their food budget and by what amount (for example, they spent \$20 less last week)? If possible, have available extra copies of the list to share with students who request it. Let them know they can make additional copies on their own and use them every week.

Extension Activities

- Pick out a healthy recipe that the class can make together from the ChooseMyPlate.gov or USDA Mixing Bowl websites listed in the page 4 sidebar. Alternatively, students can volunteer to make a recipe from the site and bring it in for a class potluck.
- Take a field trip to the supermarket and pick out healthy foods students like. Speak with a supermarket manager in advance, as they may have special resources or tours they can offer your class. The class could also visit a local farmers market with the same idea.



More Information

Eat Well on \$4 a Day

<http://tinyurl.com/khluvrw>

This 89-page guide from Leanne Brown is geared to help SNAP users eat better and healthier. Brown has a master's degree in food studies from New York University.

Raising the Bar on Nutrition

<http://rifoodbank.org/Programs/RaisingtheBaronNutrition/tabid/188/Default.aspx>

Similar to the "Eat Well on \$4 a Day" resource, the links found on the site here, from the Rhode Island Food Bank, were created to help low-income families cook healthy, affordable meals. The recipes focus on a plant-based diet and are rich in vegetables and whole grains.

Local Food Directory: Farmers Market Directory

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets>

This resource from the USDA lets users search for farmers markets by location and even type of payment accepted (farmers markets are increasingly accepting SNAP benefits). The resource is helpful but keep in mind that some of the information may be outdated. Best to check with individual markets before you visit them.

Local Harvest

<http://www.localharvest.org/>

Find local farmers markets and farmers here.

Also, if you google "what's in season graphic" and your state name, you can usually find a list of what produce is in season based on where you live.

10 tips
Nutrition
Education Series

eating better on a budget



10 tips to help you stretch your food dollars

Get the most for your food budget! There are many ways to save money on the foods that you eat. The three main steps are planning before you shop, purchasing the items at the best price, and preparing meals that stretch your food dollars.

1 plan, plan, plan!

Before you head to the grocery store, plan your meals for the week. Include meals like stews, casseroles, or stir-fries, which “stretch” expensive items into more portions. Check to see what foods you already have and make a list for what you need to buy.

2 get the best price

Check the local newspaper, online, and at the store for sales and coupons. Ask about a loyalty card for extra savings at stores where you shop. Look for specials or sales on meat and seafood—often the most expensive items on your list.



3 compare and contrast

Locate the “Unit Price” on the shelf directly below the product. Use it to compare different brands and different sizes of the same brand to determine which is more economical.

4 buy in bulk

It is almost always cheaper to buy foods in bulk. Smart choices are family packs of chicken, steak, or fish and larger bags of potatoes and frozen vegetables. Before you shop, remember to check if you have enough freezer space.

5 buy in season

Buying fruits and vegetables in season can lower the cost and add to the freshness! If you are not going to use them all right away, buy some that still need time to ripen.

6 convenience costs... go back to the basics

Convenience foods like frozen dinners, pre-cut vegetables, and instant rice, oatmeal, or grits will cost you more than if you were to make them from scratch. Take the time to prepare your own—and save!

7 easy on your wallet

Certain foods are typically low-cost options all year round. Try beans for a less expensive protein food. For vegetables, buy carrots, greens, or potatoes. As for fruits, apples and bananas are good choices.



8 cook once...eat all week!

Prepare a large batch of favorite recipes on your day off (double or triple the recipe). Freeze in individual containers. Use them throughout the week and you won't have to spend money on take-out meals.

9 get your creative juices flowing

Spice up your leftovers—use them in new ways. For example, try leftover chicken in a stir-fry or over a garden salad, or to make chicken chili. Remember, throwing away food is throwing away your money!

10 eating out

Restaurants can be expensive. Save money by getting the early bird special, going out for lunch instead of dinner, or looking for “2 for 1” deals. Stick to water instead of ordering other beverages, which add to the bill.



CREATE A GROCERY GAME PLAN

GROCERY LIST

FRUITS	GRAINS (BREADS, PASTAS, RICE, CEREALS)
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
DAIRY (MILK, YOGURT, CHEESE)	VEGETABLES
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PROTEIN FOODS (MEAT, SEAFOOD, BEANS & PEAS, NUTS, EGGS)	OTHER
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