

Cent\$ible Nutrition News

Helping Families Eat Better for Less

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From Scratch + Convenience

When it comes to budgeting, you may have heard that avoiding convenience foods is the way to go. Convenience foods, like pre-made salads and boxed meal kits, are often more expensive. However, it is important to balance cost with time and taste. The amount of time you have for cooking influences what you cook. Taste preferences influence what kinds and types of food will be enjoyed. For most families, healthy meals start with balancing basic ingredients and convenience foods. As you are shopping, consider these tips to help you make the best choice for your lifestyle:

Price

Food is getting more expensive. Comparing prices between similar items can help keep costs lower. This is true for basic ingredients as well as convenience options. Choose foods that are budget-friendly and offer good value for your money. This value includes the time it takes to prepare the food, your budget, and your family's taste preferences. If you know your family will only eat a certain type of bread that is more expensive, consider where you might buy less expensive options for other foods.

Read the Label

All packaged food comes with an ingredient list and nutrition facts label. When you have the choice, use this information to choose healthy options. Aim to choose foods lower in salt, saturated fat, and added sugars. Compare similar products for nutrients like protein, fiber, and vitamins.

Versatile Ingredients

Choose foods that can be used in a variety of dishes. This can help you create quick and easy meals with fewer ingredients, saving you time and money. Pantry staples like whole grain pasta or rice, canned beans or fish, and canned vegetables can be combined quickly to create several different, flavorful dishes. These items are also shelf stable and will last, even if plans change. Note that shelf stable, frozen, and fresh foods all have a place and a purpose in our diet. They also allow us to have more flexibility and variety in our meals.

Check for Sales and Deals

If you have a little extra in your budget, check out sales. Sales can be a good way to buy food at a lower price. Things like bread, milk, cheese, and fresh meat can be frozen and thawed later when you are ready to use them. Freezing these items also allows you to set food aside for months where the budget is tighter or the schedule is busier.

Also, consider price differences in sizes. Often, larger sizes of things like frozen fruits or vegetables, cereal, and meat, cost less than smaller sizes. It is always a good idea to compare prices per ounce to make sure.

In this issue

Page 2- Flexible Meal Planning

Page 3- Carrot Sweet Potato Muffins
News & Updates

Flexible Meal Planning

Balancing basic ingredients with convenience foods can help you stick to your budget without wasting food. Weekly meal planning allows you to turn those foods into meals without all the stress. This is because when you meal plan, you don't have to figure out what to cook each day, take extra trips to the store, or guess at what you need to buy. The secret to making easy, fast, and healthy meals on a budget begins with these tips:

Look before you shop

Before you reach for your keys, check your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer to see what ingredients you already have on hand. Note any leftovers or already prepared food that you can use.

Make a plan for the week

Consider your family's schedule and the time you have to cook. Note the school or senior center lunch menu, if these are sources of meals. Think through what meals can be prepared in just a few minutes or what meals could be doubled for planned-overs another day. It may be helpful to first outline the week's main meals, and then fill in the rest of your meals using MyPlate as a guide.

Set up your grocery trip for success

After your meal plan is set, organize your grocery list by section of the store. This helps make shopping faster and more efficient. If you have access to a grocery store that uses mobile pick up or has a free app, the cart in the app can be a tool to help you stick to your list. The app can also be useful for price checking and comparing similar foods ahead of time, even if you go into the store to shop.

Cook Once, Eat Twice

If time and budget allow, planned-overs can be a helpful way to meal plan. To create planned-overs, double a recipe or part of the recipe, such as cooking enough chicken for two different meals. Once cooked, refrigerated the extra to use within 4 days, or freeze to use later in the month. On busy



days, pull out planned-overs and have a meal on the table with minimal preparation.

There is no one right way to menu plan. Meal planning is a flexible process that can be adapted to fit your family's culture, taste preferences, and lifestyle. Whichever way you decide to use your ingredients, spending a couple minutes each week making a plan can simplify your cooking and keep you on track for your budget.

You can find more information on Meal Planning by visiting our site at uwyo.cnp.org.

For more information on budgeting from MyPlate, check out: <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/healthy-eating-budget>

Meal Prep Tip

On a day when you have more time for cooking, try baking the muffins on the next page. Cool them completely then freeze in a freezer-quality resealable bag. On busy days, grab a muffin for a quick breakfast or snack.



Carrot Sweet Potato Muffins

Ingredients

- 1⅓ cup flour
- ½ cup rolled oats
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup pureed sweet potato
- 1 cup pureed canned carrots
- 2 eggs
- Nonstick spray or muffin tin papers

Directions

1. Wash hands with warm, soapy water.
2. Preheat oven to 375°F.
3. Coat 12 muffin pan cups with nonstick spray or line with muffin papers.
4. In a medium bowl, combine flour, rolled oats, baking soda, spices, and salt.
5. In a separate bowl, combine brown sugar, sweet potatoes, carrots, and eggs. Stir into dry mixture.
6. Fill each muffin tin ⅔ full. Bake at 375°F for 20-25 minutes.

Makes 12 muffins

News & Updates

Free Seeds & Seedlings

Looking to try your hand at gardening this summer? We have you covered! Stop by your local Extension office for free seeds and/or seedlings. We're partnering with the Wyoming Cancer Coalition to give away tomato seedlings and with the Wyoming Hunger Initiative to give away seeds.

CNP + Food Resource Partners

The Cent\$ible Nutrition Program works with food pantry partners around the state and Food Bank of Wyoming. We provide recipes to partners every month. This summer, we are looking forward to some Wyoming grown foods coming to our partners. Look for us at your local pantries. We'll have recipes and food samples!



Join CNP!

Free cookbook, kitchen tools, & cooking classes!

The Cent\$ible Nutrition Program (CNP) is a resource that can help you eat better for less. Through the series of 8 lessons, you can learn how to save money and time at the grocery store, cook quick and healthy meals, and stretch your food dollars.

CNP is free to those who income qualify and participants receive a free cookbook and kitchen tools. Classes are now available online and in-person. Find out more at: <https://uwyocnp.org/cnp-qualify/> or call your local CNP educator to learn more about CNP in your county.

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