

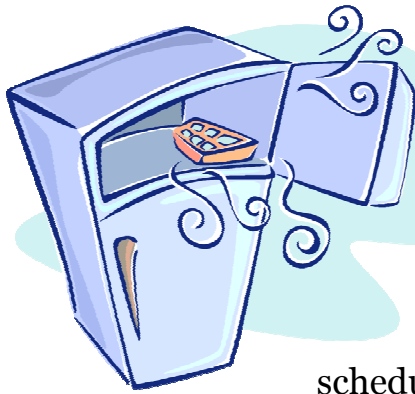
7 Smart Tips for Eating Healthy on a Budget

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Most folks I know are trying to eat healthier and I couldn't be happier to hear it. Once they've made friends with kale and quinoa, the one thing that seems to still be problematic with a healthy lifestyle is the cost of buying all those high quality fresh foods. Trust me, I get it. I have a family of five to feed in New York City and the chunk of money we spend on food won't be going down anytime soon.

I like to look at the money I spend on healthy products and ingredients as an investment in the future. Hopefully all of the antioxidant-packed fruits and vegetables, fiber-rich whole grains and organic dairy and meat products I buy will help keep me and my family in good health for years to come. Of course, I always love to save a few bucks wherever I can!

Here are some tips I've learned that will help you stick to your food budget.



1. Make friends with your freezer.

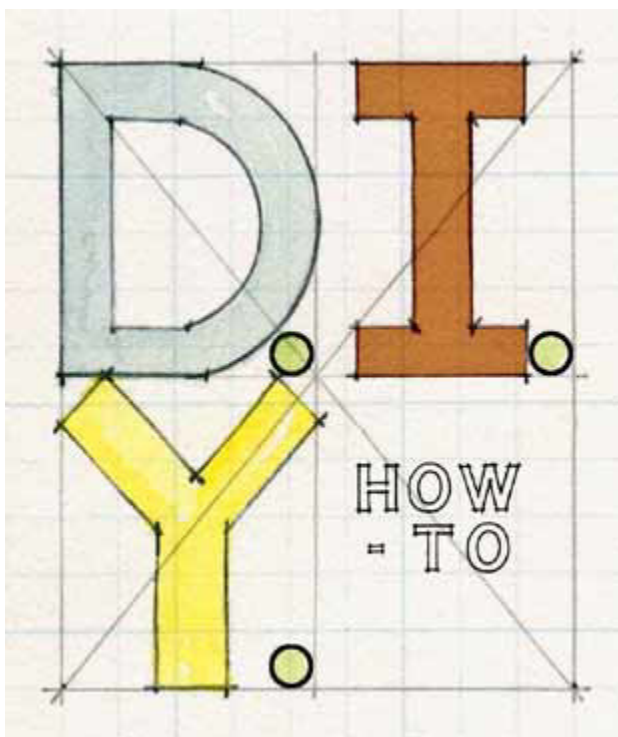
I'm frequently asked how to eat healthy when you're just cooking for one. "Buy frozen," I say. Most people look at me funny because they know I'm an advocate for fresh food. True—but that fresh food isn't going to do much for you if you don't eat it! Most of us have the best of intentions when it comes to weeknight cooking, but with crazy, busy schedules, we're challenged to cook our fresh produce in the short window it lasts in the refrigerator.

But isn't frozen food less healthy? No! Gone are the days of syrupy berries and clumpy green beans. Food is frozen using the IQF (Individually Quick Frozen) technique, in which each piece of food (i.e. each raspberry or pea) is sent down a conveyer belt into a blast freezer, which freezes the items very quickly. IQF is usually done right after harvest, so the foods are picked and packaged at their peak. This means that frozen berries may have a higher nutrient content than a pint that was shipped from California to your store in New Jersey, and then sat for a few days before you brought them home.

Beyond buying items that are already frozen, you can use your freezer to give your fresh foods a second chance. Take a look at your schedule for the week and then take inventory of your fridge. If you know you'll be working late or have social events on three or four nights, you're probably not going to cook the lamb shank you just bought or that head of broccoli. Instead of letting them languish, stick them in the freezer! With Americans throwing away 40 percent of the food produced in this country, it's a great way to save pennies and help reduce food waste.

How to Freeze your Food

- **Meat:** Since most meat already comes packaged, simply place it in the freezer as is. In general, most items will last for three months.
- **Leftovers:** Made a large batch of chili for the big game and you still have a ton left? Great! Just transfer the leftovers (they last in the fridge for just three to four days) to an airtight container and you can keep it for two to three months. If you want to pull out portions to take to work, just freeze it in smaller containers. This works for any soup or stew.
- **Vegetables:** Aside from salad greens, most vegetables freeze quite well, but you do need to blanch them first. Cut the vegetables into bite-size pieces (such as florets) and add them to boiling water just until the color of the vegetable brightens, usually about two to three minutes. Then plunge into ice water to stop the cooking process and drain. Once the veggies are dry, spread them out on a baking sheet and freeze until firm. Then simply transfer to an airtight container or zip-top bag and store. If you end up doing this a lot, you may want to invest in a vacuum sealing system.
- **Fruit:** Fruit doesn't need to be blanched before being frozen, but you want to freeze it before it's overripe. Simply wash and dry the fruit and remove any stems or pits. Stone fruit, such as peaches, plums and nectarines, should be cut into slices. Then freeze the pieces of fruit on baking sheets in a single layer and transfer to bags or containers.



2. Go DIY

Last year my husband developed a serious kombucha habit. He was spending about \$90 a month on those bottles of fermented tea. When I pointed out that his new health potion was cutting into our diaper budget he finally relented and started making his own brew at home. He's spent about \$108 on bottles and equipment, but we'll be saving big bucks for months to come.

I'm not a kombucha gal, but I do slather a ton of nut butter on everything from bananas to bread. I learned that I could save up to \$5 a jar by buying raw nuts and giving them a spin in my food processor instead of buying the premade stuff. Plus, you can get creative and add in other good-for-you ingredients like flax seed and ground

cinnamon in your homemade nut butter recipes.

Whether it's homemade granola bars or chia pudding, find something you're spending too much on and see if you can make your own fabulous version at home.

3. Take it with you.

There are more healthy snacks on the market than ever, which certainly makes it easier to make smart choices on the go. But depending upon which store you hit, you may be paying a lot more for that convenience. Even though I live in a pretty small space in Brooklyn, I stock up on the snacks I rely on, like fresh fruit and KIND bars. For example, a box of 12 bars costs me between \$19.95 and \$21.99 per box versus \$2.50 per bar at the drug store. That's a savings of around \$120 a year!



4. Stock up.

With small urban kitchens and limited storage space, I know this is sometimes easier said than done. I actually think it's a waste of money to buy something in bulk unless you're really sure you're going to use it. I think it's smarter to simply buy items that you love when they're on sale. For us that means buying organic, grass-fed meat when it's on sale and then popping it in the freezer, or splurging on pints of organic blueberries when they're two for \$7. It also means buying a slightly larger bag of nuts or whole grain flour because it's cheaper by the ounce—remember—you can always put it in the freezer.



5. Go for plant power.

Whether you're testing out a vegan diet or you're simply opting for Meatless Monday, lots of people are embracing going meatless at least occasionally. And lucky for us, plant protein is easy to come by in the form of beans, lentils, peas and chickpeas. You can buy a 16-ounce bag

of organic dried beans for about \$3, which comes out to 10 cents per serving. Some beans do take a long time to cook, but lentils and split peas are ready in 30 minutes or less. Canned beans are great too—just make sure to give them a rinse first to lower the sodium content.

6. Split it.

Ground spices and seeds are items that can be pricey (a pound of chia seeds can cost \$14), but you generally only use a little of them at a time. Why not go half-sizes with a health-minded friend or neighbor? Just transfer half of the product into a zip-top bag or airtight container and write the expiration date on it with a marker and you're good to go for half the price. Nice!





7. Get organized!

With three little ones underfoot, this is one tip that I personally struggle with every day. I don't even want to think about how many times I've bought fresh salmon or halibut just to see that the sell-by date has passed by the time I've remembered to cook it.

If you spend a little time each week to organize the contents of your fridge you'll be more likely to see what you have, which means you'll waste less, which leads to...you guessed it—savings!

Top Tips

- **Invest in clear containers:** Opaque containers may add a pop of color to your fridge, but I find that I'm less likely to actually use what's in them because I can't tell what they are at a glance. Clear containers, whether glass or plastic, are ideal because you can quickly scan for leftovers and use them up in the recommended three to four day timeframe.
- **Rotate, rotate, rotate:** Become your own stock clerk and rotate the items in your fridge every couple of days. Ditch the stuff that is past its prime and place leftovers and things that need to be used quickly to the front of the shelf at eye level. This may require adjusting the height of your shelves, but hey, it's worth it!
- **Mark it up:** Ever look in your cheese drawer and wonder just how long you've had that piece of Parmesan? Most hard cheeses last a long time, but after you've used them and then rewrapped them in plastic wrap, they often go unused because we're not sure how old they are. Buy a permanent black marker and write the date you purchased the cheese on the plastic. If you rewrap it, just rewrite the date on it again. Cheese doesn't often have a use-by date, but if there is one, include that too.

I hope these tips give you some practical ideas for shaving money off of your food bill each month. And just think, with all the money you'll be saving, you can invest in a slow cooker and start bringing your lunch to work.