Spend Smart, Eat Smart: Strategies You Can Use

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Strategies You Can Use

Buying the most food for the least money means using all your resources:

- How much MONEY do you have to spend?
- How much TIME can you trade for money?
- What SKILLS and KNOWLEDGE do you have (or need) related to buying and preparing food?

Spend Smart strategy #1

Buy the most you can with the dollars you have

Choosing more nutritious foods gives you the most value for your dollar.

Compare unit prices to find the best dollar value

Unit price = package price divided by number of units (ounces or items)

Use unit pricing to compare

- package sizes—bigger is not always cheaper.
- brands—generic or store brands are often, but not always, lower in price.
- product forms (fresh, frozen, and canned items) or individual items, such as apples or rolls.

Some states require stores to show unit prices. Look for them on the shelf in front of the product, above the product, or to the side of the product.

If unit pricing is not posted, you can figure it yourself using the calculator on your cell phone to do the simple math.

Compare the Nutrition Facts labels on products to find the best nutritional value

You can compare the gram amounts of fiber, sugar, or protein, for example. Or compare the % Daily Value amounts—a value of 20 percent or more is considered high; a value of 5 percent or less is considered low.

Find more tips at www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings
Spend Smart strategy #2

Invest your time to save money

Use plan-ahead tactics

• Spend 10 minutes in the morning putting ingredients into a slow cooker—instead of after work in the ready-to-eat-carry-out line.
• Once a week, make a double recipe of a favorite soup, stew, or casserole; freeze the extra in meal-size amounts.
  (For more ideas, see Healthy Meals in a Hurry, PM 2035)*
• Spend 15 to 20 minutes planning a week’s worth of evening meals; check current supplies, then write a shopping list for what you need to buy.

Make a price book to monitor prices of frequently purchased products

1. Find or buy a small address book or notebook.
2. Write down the product name, package size, price, store, and date.
3. Compare the written prices to advertised specials. After a few weeks, you’ll know the best prices for the items on your list.

Spend Smart strategy #3

Use all the skills you have and develop new skills

Apply your organizational skills

• Use see-through storage containers for refrigerated leftovers.
• Check supplies before going to the store.
• Write the date on packaged foods before storing in freezer or cupboard; arrange supplies so the oldest items are in front and use them first.
• Post a written inventory of what’s in your freezer; designate a specific area for ready-to-reheat leftovers; cross off or add items as they are used and purchased.
• Keep a grocery list in the notes section of your cell phone for easy reference.
• Plan potlucks with friends instead of always meeting at restaurants.

Practice your food preparation and meal planning skills

• Label, date, and freeze leftover main dishes in meal-size servings.
• Plan leftovers into next-day breakfasts, lunches, snacks, or dinners.
• Take a basic cooking class or get ideas from websites, cookbooks, and magazines.

Visit these websites for more ideas

ISU Extension Spend Smart. Eat Smart. www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings
Videos showing how to prepare simple recipes www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings
ISU Extension Food, Nutrition, and Health www.extension.iastate.edu/healthnutrition
eXtension Families, Food, and Fitness www.extension.org/families%20food%20fitness
ISU AnswerLine www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline (or, call 1-800-262-3804)

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No endorsement of mentioned products or firms is intended nor is criticism implied of those not mentioned. Quoted prices were collected in central Iowa, Fall 2008. Although prices vary with date and location, the comparative differences generally follow a similar pattern.

www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings