

Thrifty Food Choices

Managing Your Food Dollars

Have you ever had a month when you ran out of food dollars? Careful planning and shopping can help you buy more food with the dollars you have to spend. You and your family can get the nutrition you need to be healthy.



Before Shopping

- **Budget your food resources.**

Consider how money, food stamps and WIC coupons should be spent throughout the month.

- **Plan what you will eat.** Use weekly food ads from the grocers to help you plan. Remember the U.S. Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid servings when planning meals. Also think about family meal preferences, but introduce new foods every now and then. Check food supplies you have on hand. The more planning you do, the less chance you have for overspending and the better your chance for eating well. By planning ahead, you can often save money by using leftovers in another day's meals. Then you call them planned-overs.

- **Make a shopping list.** This will keep you from buying what you don't need. It will also help you remember what you do need. Extra trips to the store cost money. It's a good idea to keep an ongoing list on the refrigerator.

- **Coupons and memberships.** Look for stores that double coupons. Join a store's reward membership program to take advantage of 2-for-1 and other weekly sales.

Shopping Smart

- **Use unit pricing** to help you compare prices among different sizes, different brands (store brand and national brand) and different forms of a food (canned, frozen or fresh). Unit price labels are usually found on the edge of the shelf under each product and show cost per ounce.
- **Buy generic brands** to get the same product at a lower price.
- **Read the Nutrition Facts label.** A low-cost food may not be a nutritious food. Use the label to make healthy food choices.
- **Buy seasonal fresh foods** when they are most plentiful in your area. Seasonal produce at a farmer's market and produce stands usually cost less.
- **Compare cost per serving**, not cost per pound when buying meats. For example, you'll get more servings from a pound of ground beef that has no bones than a pound of spare ribs with a lot of bone and fat.
- **Be cautious of impulse buying.** Buy only if an item is a good buy, nutritious and the family wants and needs it.
- **Beware of location or placement of foods.** More costly items are usually at eye level. End-of-aisle displays are not always a bargain. Items that are next to register are usually not nutritious and cost more.

After Shopping

- Store and prepare food properly. Take food straight home, and store it properly in the refrigerator, freezer or pantry. Buy only what you can eat before it goes bad. Spoiled food adds to your food costs and could make you sick if you eat it.

PORK AND SWEET POTATO SKILLET

Here's a quick low-cost dish that's sure to please. Complete the meal by adding a vegetable, cornbread and a glass of skim milk.

- 4 thinly cut pork chops (about 1 pound)
- 1/8 teaspoon allspice
- Vegetable cooking spray
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup apple juice
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 medium onion sliced
- 1 17-ounce can sweet potatoes
- 1 tablespoon flour

Trim fat from chops. Spray skillet with vegetable cooking spray. Brown chops on both sides in hot frying pan. Add 3/4 cup apple juice. Top with onion slices. Cover and cook 5 minutes at reduced heat. Mix flour and seasonings. Stir into remaining 1/4 cup apple juice. Stir into liquid in pan. Arrange sweet potatoes around and over chops. Spoon sauce over potatoes. Cover and cook about 15 minutes longer, until potatoes are hot and chops are done. Serves 4.

Each serving has 270 calories, 6 grams total fat (2 grams saturated fat), 45 milligrams cholesterol and 192 milligrams of sodium.



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