

7 Money-Saving Tips from Pro Chefs

by Chef Lisa Lavery



The average American family spends about \$750 a month on groceries so it's no secret that shopping for meals can take a big chunk out of the budget. With a huge array of shopping options out there, it can be hard to focus in on the best way to maximize your grocery dollars. Here are a few money-saving tips to help shop for a healthy meal plan that doesn't break the bank.

1. Make a grocery list.

Spend some time in a calm moment and think about what your food wants, and needs are for the week. Then do an inventory of your pantry so you don't buy more than you need. Replace any basics (think: oil, vinegar and spices) as needed and supplement with fresh veggies and protein. Make your grocery

list and stick to it! It will help you stay on track with your weekly meal prep and cut down on food waste.

TIP: Make a grocery list on your Foodsmart by Zipongo app, so you don't forget any important ingredients.

2. Build a basic pantry.

A well-stocked basic pantry fully with oils, vinegar, dried beans, grains and spices can even allow you to cook a basic meal without spending a dime. And when you're looking over a recipe, feel free to substitute. Don't have farro? Use brown rice. Chop up whatever is lurking in your crisper drawer at the end of the week to make a veggie-packed soup. In a professional kitchen, it's called "cooking out of the house." The goal is to use everything you purchased before buying any new items.

3. Stay away from the inner aisles in the grocery store.

The interior of the store is where the convenience foods are shelved. While it might be easy to reach for a boxed rice pilaf or meal kit, you're going to pay extra. They may look inexpensive, but the price per serving is likely more than if you cook it from scratch. In addition to being more expensive, they have preservatives and loads of sodium for shelf stability so they're taxing on both your wallet and your health.

4. Hit the farmer's market.

Find your local farmers market. Not only does it get you outside and walking you'll also be buying food that's in season. It's fresher, tastes better, and comes from the source, meaning you're not paying extra for transport and storage in a warehouse.

5. Buy whole foods.

Convenience is costly. A plastic container of pre-cut butternut squash is going to be more expensive than the whole vegetable alternative. Make some time after you're done shopping to chop up that head of broccoli or cauliflower and store in the crisper drawer. You'll get more for your money and bonus...whole foods taste better too!

6. Maximize your freezer.

It's a great place to store fruits and veggies to reach for in a pinch. Chop fresh in-season fruit and freeze the chunks in an even layer on sheet trays. And although we don't endorse the flavor of all frozen veggies, chopped spinach, peas and edamame can be dinner saviors. They're cheaper and easier to use than their fresh counterparts. Stir them into pastas, soups, and grain bowls with no extra cooking needed.

7. Buy in bulk.

Items in the bulk aisle are significantly less expensive than their boxed counterparts. Beans, grains, rice, and oats are always solid choices. Invest in some stackable containers with lids to store everything when you get home. Not only will you save money, but there's less waste, and you can see everything at a glance. An organized pantry is a maximized pantry.

With just a few simple tweaks to your regular grocery routine, you can save money without compromising the healthy food your family needs. Happy shopping!

