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Deborah Rhoades, M.A., R.D.
Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

FOOD PRICES CONTINUE TO RISE

If you have done any grocery shopping lately, you have probably noticed costs are rising. A comparison between last year's tables for 2009 to this year's reveals that prices are up by 10% in all spending categories. Yes, you read this right...TEN PERCENT!

Since food is something that you cannot live without, this might be the time to look seriously on how you can cut your grocery bills. Food typically is the second largest expenditure in the budget, after housing. Thus, an area that deserves your close attention.

According to the Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, U.S. Average, food prices for a typical family of four with two adults and two children ages 6-8 and 9-11 is listed in the table below.

Food Plan	Monthly Cost	Yearly Cost
THRIFTY	\$ 584	\$ 7,003
LOW-COST	\$ 758	\$ 9,096
MODERATE-COST	\$ 950	\$ 11,400
LIBERAL	\$ 1,152	\$ 13,824

This data is updated monthly to reflect what it costs to purchase food for a nutritious diet. To access tables see <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/FoodPlans/2010/CostofFoodFeb10.pdf>

If your family includes teens, which may be going through a growth spurt and have high calorie needs, prices will be even higher. For example, add a 16-year old boy to the family and your food prices increase by \$157 to \$315 a month depending on the Food Plan.

What are tips for saving money for each of the five food groups?

BREADS AND GRAINS

- Make your own flavored rice dishes instead of buying boxed rice mixes, which are high in cost and sodium.
- Skip the instant hot cereals like oatmeal, cream of wheat, and grits. The quick cooking varieties can be prepared in the microwave just as quickly.
- Prepare items from scratch instead of buying already made. To make items partially whole grain, substitute half of the all-purpose flour with white whole-wheat flour in your favorite recipes.
- Freeze leftover bread and use to make your own croutons and breadcrumbs.
- Buy items in bulk.

FRUITS

- Buy fruits in season, when they cost less, from your local farm. Not only will you save money on gasoline, you will be supporting your local economy. Some farms allow you to pick your own produce for an even lower cost. For a listing of Frederick County (FC) local farms and farmer's markets visit www.discoverfrederickmd.com/farmersmarket To find out what is in season visit the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) website at http://www.marylandsbest.net/in_season.php
- Can, freeze or dry fruits in season. For questions on these preservation methods go to University of Maryland Extension website at <http://pubs.agnr.umd.edu/Category.cfm?ID=F> or call our office at 301-600-1599.

VEGETABLES

- Buy vegetables in season, when they cost less. To find out what is in season visit the MDA website at http://www.marylandsbest.net/in_season.php For a listing of local farms and farmer's markets visit www.discoverfrederickmd.com/farmersmarket
- Buy store brand canned vegetables, which cost less. Vegetables are canned immediately after they are picked so they are just as nutritious as fresh. If sodium is a concern look for vegetables without added salt. Salted canned vegetables can be rinsed in cold water to remove sodium.
- Shop for large bags of frozen vegetables, which cost less per pound. Cook what you need and close the bag tightly with a rubber band. To prevent freezer burn place the bag of frozen vegetables into a second plastic bag designed for freezing.
- If you only need a small amount of a vegetable for a recipe get it from the salad bar. For instance, you need celery for tuna salad. You buy the entire package of celery, when you only need a few stalks, and it just sits in the produce bin until it is thrown out.
- Learn how to store vegetables properly so they do not spoil and rot. For guidelines visit <http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/spfiles/SP291-L.pdf>
- Can or freeze vegetables when they are in season.
- Dry vegetables to use for soups and stew.

MILK AND DAIRY PRODUCTS

- Use reconstituted nonfat dry milk for cooking; no one will know the difference.
- Buy fresh milk in gallon containers, which cost less than quarts or half gallons, provided you would use it before it spoils. Check the sell by date to get the freshest product.

- Purchase dairy products at big box stores like Costco and Sam's Club. Studies show dairy prices are 5 to 25 percent lower at these stores than traditional supermarkets. A new store, Aldi, sells a gallon of milk for \$1.99, regardless of the type of milk.
- Buy cheese in large quantities, which cost less. Shred part of the cheese and freeze for cooking. Avoid buying already shredded cheeses, which are usually more costly.
- Instead of buying buttermilk when a recipe calls for it, make your own by adding one tablespoon distilled white vinegar or lemon juice to one cup of milk.

MEAT AND PROTEIN SOURCES

- Try having meatless meals several times a week. Included are recipes for Veggie Burrito and Garden Lasagna.
- Serve smaller portion sizes. A three-ounce portion is the size of a deck of cards and ample to meet nutritional needs. Replace steaks on the grill with steak kabobs, which use much less meat.
- Decrease the amount of meat called for in a recipe by adding more vegetables in spaghetti sauce, tacos, stews, soups, etc.
- Check grocery store weekly ads, buy on sale and freeze for later use. You can access the ads at the *Eat Smart, Be Fit, Maryland* website at www.eatsmart.umd.edu
- Try lesser expensive cuts of meat like chuck or bottom round instead of sirloin. Moist cooking methods and marinades will make the meat tender.
- Serve eggs, the highest biological source of protein in the food supply. One egg has the same amount of protein as one ounce of meat. Instead of meat for dinner serve quiche or breakfast dishes like French toast, strata or scrambled eggs. Make egg salad for lunches, a much cheaper alternative to luncheon meats that can easily cost over \$5.00 a pound.
- Once a week a week, have canned tuna or salmon cakes (see recipe), both inexpensive sources of fish.

VEGGIE BURRITOS

3/4 cup diced yellow squash
 3/4 cup diced zucchini squash
 1/2 cup sliced red bell pepper
 1/2 cup sliced sweet onion
 1 tablespoon water
 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
 1/4 teaspoon red (cayenne) pepper or to taste
 1 can (15 oz.) black beans, rinsed and drained
 1/2 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
 1/4 cup snipped fresh cilantro
 8 large flour tortillas
 Non-fat sour cream, if desired
 Salsa, if desired

Combine squash, red pepper, onion and water in 2-quart microwave-safe casserole. Cover with casserole lid. MICROWAVE (high) 4 to 5 minutes or until vegetables are tender, stirring once.

Drain. Stir in chili powder, cayenne pepper and black beans. Lightly mix in cheese and cilantro. Spoon about 1/3 cup of mixture down center of each tortilla. Fold edges over filling. Place seam-side-down on microwave-safe serving plate.

MICROWAVE (high), uncovered, 2 1/2 to 3 minutes or until heated, rotating plate once. If desired, serve with sour cream and salsa. Makes about 8 servings.

GARDEN LASAGNA

4 medium zucchini, coarsely chopped
1 large onion, chopped
1 medium-size green pepper, chopped
1 medium carrot, grated
1/2 cup chopped celery
1 clove garlic, minced
3 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
2 (16-oz.) cans stewed tomatoes, undrained
1 (8-oz.) can tomato sauce
1 (6-oz.) can tomato paste
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
2 teaspoons dried Italian seasoning
1 teaspoon dried whole basil
1/2 teaspoon seasoning salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
3 quarts water
2 teaspoons salt
9 lasagna noodles
1 (16 oz.) carton ricotta cheese
2 cups (8 oz.) shredded Swiss cheese
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Sauté zucchini, onion, green pepper, carrot, celery, and garlic in oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat 15 minutes. Stir in next 8 ingredients; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 30 minutes. Uncover and simmer an additional 45 minutes or until sauce is thickened, stirring occasionally.

Combine water and salt in a large Dutch oven; bring to a boil. Gradually add noodles. Boil, uncovered, 12 to 15 minutes or until noodles are just tender; drain well.

Spread 1/4 of sauce in a lightly greased 13-x9-x2-inch baking dish. Top with 3 noodles, 1/3 of ricotta cheese, 1/4 of Swiss & Parmesan cheeses; repeat layers twice. Top with remaining sauce, Swiss & Parmesan cheese. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 35 to 40 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving. Yield: 8 servings.

SALMON CAKES

8 ounces canned salmon
1/4 cup dry bread crumbs (see recipe)
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1 teaspoon dried dill
1 egg
1 Tablespoon mayonnaise
2 teaspoons horseradish
1 tablespoon cooking oil or vegetable oil cooking spray.

Open salmon and drain well; remove skin. Chop onion. Beat egg lightly. Add bread crumbs, onion, dill, egg, mayonnaise and horseradish to salmon. Stir ingredients until mixed well. Form into 4 equal size salmon cakes. Heat oil or cooking spray in a medium size skillet. Cook salmon cakes on both sides until golden brown. Serves four.

BREAD CRUMBS

2 slices bread, any kind

Place bread in 300°F oven and bake for 5 minutes. Turn bread over and bake another 5 minutes. Put bread into re-sealable plastic bag and close bag. Use a rolling pin and crush bread into small pieces.

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, LDN, is a licensed Registered Dietitian and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences. For more information about the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County Office check out our website <http://Frederick.umd.edu>

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