

## Healthy eating on a budget

There can be many reasons for needing a food budget; reduced incomes through benefits, redundancy or ill health are just three possibilities. Whatever your reasons are to count the pennies spent on food it doesn't mean the end of healthy eating.

Danielle Reynolds, author of *Economic Eating*, faced the challenge of providing breakfast, lunch and dinner for herself, husband and any guests with a budget of £100 per month (£1.78 per person per day). In 2010 redundancy meant there was just one low wage income to pay essential bills, £50 was needed for travel to keep wages coming in and £100 was left for food. "Keeping healthy on a budget meant making meals at home because buying lunch out or a takeaway is much more expensive. Many meals can be made quickly and easily so you're not spending all your time in the kitchen if you don't want to."

Fact: \*\*The Office of National Statistics living costs and food survey showed the average couple spent £235 per month on the supermarket shop in the same year.\*\*

### 3 step plan

#### 1. Plan Ahead

Start by writing a list of healthy meals you like, try to consider meals that have similar ingredients too for example bolognaise, lasagne and cottage pie all have mince beef (or vegetarian mince) as a main ingredient.

Suggestion: \*\* If you don't know how to make the meals you like already, try asking family/friends or researching recipes using the internet/ local library - don't be scared to adjust your recipe to your taste by swapping ingredients that you really don't like for something suitable or missing out the pinch of something expensive .\*\*

Decide what to have for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This could be done for just one day, a week or (like Economic Eating) a month but will only work if you stick to it!

Suggestion: \*\*If planning over a long period of time, you also need to consider when meals are being eaten in relation to when the shopping is being done, ingredients will need to be stored until they are used so put meals that use fresh items close to shopping days, or be prepared to shop for a few items often.\*\*

#### 2. Ingredients and shopping list

Once you know what you will be eating, write a list of ingredients and quantities that you need to make the meals, remember to take off anything that you already have in cupboards, the fridge or the freezer. What is left is the list of things that you need to buy.

#### 3. At the shops

Only buy what you need. If a perishable item is purchased in a larger quantity than you require try to plan meals that will use this up before it perishes.

Try not to be tempted by "deals and offers" on items you can't store or don't use frequently because these are likely to go in the bin.

Fact: \*\* According to Love food Hate waste, households in the UK through away approximately £60 worth of food and drink each month\*\*

### More tips to save at the shops

- Consider the purpose of your ingredient for example; a stew can use cheaper cuts of meat because it is slow cooked.
- Frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables are cheaper than fresh and count equally towards the 5 a day recommendation. They also store easily and can be more accurately portioned, which saves food being wasted.
- Pre packed fruit and vegetables versus the loose ones can vary in price so check which gives the better deal for what you need. Also, prices can vary dependant on the quantity of product being bought- more isn't always cheaper.
- Premium/branded products on offer can sometimes be cheaper than own brand so these are also worth looking at.
- Simple foods are versatile. For example, the potato can be; boiled, mashed, baked, roasted, cut into chips or wedges.

Suggestion: \*\*Concentrating on the price and working out the best for everything you need to buy is time consuming at first but becomes easier and quicker with practice, if you can, shop when the supermarket is less busy midweek daytimes and late evenings can often be best.\*\*

### Soup is super!

Fresh soup is easily made at home (in as little as 10 minutes) and costs as little 6p per 100ml.

#### Simple Tomato soup – 4 large servings (250ml) 12p each

1 Medium onion (14p)  
 400g tinned chopped tomatoes (31p)  
 1 Chicken or vegetable stock cube (1p) 500ml Water  
 Salt, pepper, herbs or spices to taste.

Method:

1. Chop and slowly heat the onion in a saucepan with a little water until the onions are translucent (this gives natural sweetness to the soup).
2. Add the tomatoes and stock made with the remaining water to the pan keep on a medium heat for 5 minutes.
3. Liquidise with a hand blender or food processor, if you don't have a liquidiser chunky soup is just as tasty.
4. Season with salt, pepper, herbs or spices before serving or leave to go cold and store for later in the fridge up to 3 days or freezer for longer.

### Chicken Chow Mein

Often a take away favourite costing approximately £5, this can be made at home quickly and easily for less than £1.25 a serving.

Ingredients - for 2-3 portions

250 g Chicken thigh or breast (£1.50)  
2 Noodle cakes (30p) 270g Stir fry vegetables (60p)  
1 Garlic clove (2p) 2tsp cooking oil (2p)  
Ginger, chilli, soy sauce to taste. Water.

Method:

1. Dice the chicken and cook in the sauce pan or wok with the oil (time will depend on the size of chicken pieces).
2. Whilst the chicken is cooking rehydrate the noodles to the packet instructions then drain.
3. Crush or chop the garlic and add it to the pan with other spices and soy sauce.
4. Add the stir fry vegetables and cook for 3-5 minutes.
5. Combine with the noodles and serve.

## **10 minute meals**

### **Poached fish with vegetable couscous**

Ingredients - one serving = 57p- £1.22.

1 piece of fish (price depends on fish 35p-£1) 160g  
50g Couscous (10p)  
Mixed vegetables (12p)  
½ stock cube, herbs, spices (optional)

Method:

1. Poach fish and heat vegetables to pack instructions.
2. Make couscous to pack instructions with stock water or adding herbs or spices for more flavour.
3. Combine and serve.