

# EATING NUTRITIONALLY ON A BUDGET

READING FOOD LABELS AND NAVIGATING THE  
GROCERY STORE



Jenny Robertson BA RHN  
[www.balancedwithjenny.com](http://www.balancedwithjenny.com)



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# INTRODUCTION

I know as well as anyone that feeding ourselves and our family can take a big “bite” out of the family budget.

It certainly doesn't help matters when the prices seem to increase far more often than our pay-check does.

I designed the following e-guide with this in mind because:

## THERE IS GOOD NEWS

With a little bit of planning and the help of some realistic tips and strategies, it is possible to eat nutritionally on a budget.

## THE EXTRA TIME AND EFFORT IS WORTH IT

After all we can't expect our body to remain as active and healthy as possible if we aren't properly nourishing and supporting it.

# CHAPTER 1:

## *Eating Nutritionally On A Budget*

You don't have to spend a lot of money to eat nutritionally. In fact, the opposite is true. Packaged, prepared, brand name, imported, out of season, and convenience foods will eat up your grocery budget in no time.

Here are some realistic and easy to implement tips and strategies that will get you well on your way to eating nutritionally on a budget.

Grow your own food – plant a garden, not only is it a great way to provide your family with fresh, nutrient dense, good quality food but it's a great way to get outside, exercise, unwind and de-stress. If you don't have the space or ability to plant a full-size garden then grow some cherry tomatoes, herbs, lettuces, and small peppers that can be grown in pots on your deck during the summer months.

Buy in season and buy locally – doing so will help to ensure that you are buying the freshest and best quality food items. It also allows you to be a more informed consumer; you are able to speak with the grower, ask questions and know what the growing methods/practices are. You will also find that the cost is lower or at least comparable to grocery store prices and you have the added benefit of knowing that you've helped out the environment by cutting down on transportation needs and fancy packaging.

Join a food co-op or an organic produce plan – source locally for food co-op opportunities and/or produce plans in your area. These are great ways to obtain good quality, fresh foods (often certified organic products) that are affordable and fit nicely into your family budget plan

Plan meals ahead, know what you have on hand and think about what you would like to cook

Make a food budget, and stick to it!



When you do purchase at your local food market/ grocery store, adopt the following strategies to foster **HEALTHIER NUTRITION ON A BUDGET**

- Avoid “ready-to-eat” foods. Buying basic, whole food items will save you money and will be healthier for you and your family.
- Read labels – be sure you’re getting the best nutrition for your food dollar.
- Foods that have a Nutrition Facts label will also have an “ingredients” list. The ingredients are listed from “most” to “least” -- in other words, if sugar is the first ingredient, you know that the food is mostly sugar!
- Shop wisely by using a shopping list, compare prices, and look at labels
- Shop alone if you can, and be sure that you aren't hungry when you go - hungry shoppers find it hard to stick to the list!

- Be flexible -- if you see an unadvertised special that is too good to pass up and is **HEALTHY**, change your plan -- add that food to your list.
- Don't spend too much time in the grocery store – you're apt to spend more
- Be aware that foods at eye-level in the grocery store tend to be more expensive
- Stock up on sale items, as long as they are **HEALTHY** choices





## Also adopt some of these strategies:

- Buy the whole chicken and cut it up yourself, ensure that you are purchasing fresh, good quality meats from grain fed sources only
- Eat more vegetarian meals – meat is very expensive and unless you're buying free range, you should be questioning the quality.
- Buy in bulk, avoid packaging – again read the labels provided for each item and choose wisely. Purchase from a well-known and frequented bulk foods store, this will ensure that the product you are purchasing has a regular turnover and is fresh
- Cook more – eat out less; not only is this a money saver but it helps to ensure that you are eating healthy and have control over the ingredients and cooking methods

- Cook/Prepare in quantity – invest in a slow cooker (Cost is approx. .50¢ to operate for 8 hours)
- Take your lunch to work/school; choose a fun lunch container and get creative! This will not only save you money but it also allows you to have more control over the food items/ingredients you are consuming and the preparation methods
- Make your own coffee – choose organic whenever possible or better yet, drink green tea instead
- Eat nutrient dense food – you'll be less hungry. Choose good quality, wholesome food choices; incorporate more vegetables and fruits, whole grains, healthy fats, complete proteins and complex carbohydrates

## CHAPTER 2:

### *Reading Food Labels*

When it comes to buying food my first bit of advice is to try to buy foods that don't come with a food label!

My second bit of advice is that for those that do, always read the list of ingredients first:

- Ask yourself: do you recognize the names? Can you pronounce them? How many dyes and artificial colors are in here?
- And then ask yourself: how might my body feel after eating this? Chances are you might put the product back without going any further.
- If the list of ingredients doesn't scare you off, check the nutrients table next:

We need to eat from all of the major food groups and that includes carbohydrates, proteins and fats but what we need to watch is how much we eat of each.

- Generally we want to avoid anything that is very high in sugar or sodium. We also want to avoid anything that contains trans fats (or any modified or hydrogenated oils, for that matter).
- When trying to determine calories, 1 gram of fat = 9 calories and 1 gram of carb or protein = 4 calories.
- Always look at the portion size they've used to calculate all the other information. Often they will reduce the portion size in an effort to make the other numbers look good and, in reality, you might end up eating double or even triple the amount

Be aware of “jargon”, it can be very misleading and it can leave you purchasing items that really are not the healthiest choices.

For example:

If a product has a claim pertaining to the sodium content be aware of the following:

- “Reduced sodium” means that there is 25% less sodium than the “normal” version
- “light in sodium” means there is 50% less sodium than the “normal” version
- “low sodium” means there is 140 mg or less
- “very low sodium” means there is 35 mg or less

\*our aim should be to keep our daily sodium intake at around 2300 mg per day; this is considered the upper limit and it can be quite easy to surpass especially if we are using salt to season our meals.

Be aware of food additives that appear on the list of ingredients.

- Food coloring: potential toxicity (especially yellow tartrazine – some people have skin rashes and asthmatic symptoms); it can cause stress to the liver; potential carcinogenicity. Children often have very strong mood reactions to food coloring.
- Aspartame is a nervous system irritant and should always be avoided. You will be hard pressed to find any chewing gum that doesn't contain it unless you buy it from the health food store. Look out for it in no-fat yogurt as well as diet sodas.
- BHT is commonly found in the packaging of cereal boxes to maintain freshness – can be irritating to the liver and kidneys, especially if they are already weak.
- BVO is added to drinks to give a cloudy look to appear more real. Also added to oils to make them heavier and distribute more easily in other products.

- MSG – found in everything from Chinese food to bouillon cubes can cause headaches, agitation, increased heart rate, tingling muscles or skin.
- Nitrite and nitrates: The body converts them to nitrosamines which are highly carcinogenic. If you do eat them, take vitamin C with them which may help to counteract them. Nitrates are commonly found in preserved meats, e.g. ham, turkey, hot dogs, bacon etc. Sulfites, often found in wine and dried fruits, can trigger allergic reactions such as headaches, nausea, diarrhea, irritated membranes etc.
- Sulfur dioxide is sprayed on fruits and vegetables to help them maintain their color and protect against attacks from micro-organisms.

Don't rely simply on the calories... I find this to be one of the most common mistakes that people make when selecting items.

Calories, in and of themselves, are not a bad thing. They represent the amount of energy you will get from that food.

More importantly, think:

What kind of energy is this?

- If it's 100 calories of sugar, that is 100 calories to be avoided!

By choosing whole nutrient-dense foods, you'll be choosing items that are lower in calories.

As an added bonus or incentive this means that you can:

- eat more of the item and not feel like you are being restricted or deprived
- benefit from the abundance of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients needed for our overall health and wellness



# CHAPTER 3:

## *Navigating The Grocery Store*

The grocery store can be an overwhelming “pit” of temptation if we allow it to be.

They are designed with one mission in mind... to have “you” the “consumer” buy product (a lot of product)... and they use various strategies to make sure that you do just that, including:

- Brightly colored signage to “grab your attention”
- Sales items prominently displayed throughout the store to make sure that you take advantage of the great savings
- Placement of various “non-foods/junk-foods” in the produce aisle or the dairy aisle in hopes that temptation will lead you to add it to your cart

Stick to the perimeter of the grocery store, this is where you will tend to find more of the natural whole foods we want to purchase and less of the processed, pre-packaged “non-food” items we want to avoid.

Generally you will find the following products located along the perimeter of the grocery store:

- Fresh produce (fruits and vegetables)
- Breads (both freshly baked and packaged)
- Bulk seeds and nuts
- Meat
- Dairy

At least 75% of your food budget should be spent on items along the perimeter of the store. The remaining 25% of your budget should be spent on healthy “staple” items such as brown rice, whole wheat flour and pasta, canned tuna and salmon, healthy oils (flaxseed, olive oil, coconut oil) etc.

# TIPS TO REMEMBER

- Avoid “edible food-like substances” and instead stick to natural whole foods
- Don’t eat anything that your great grandmother wouldn’t have recognize as food
- Don’t eat anything that won’t eventually rot, if you are selecting natural whole foods they will not last an unnaturally amount of time
- Check the ingredients – do you recognize what they are? If not it’s best kept out of your grocery cart
- Choose quality over quantity
- Try to avoid food products that make a health claim, these claims are often misleading
- Try to avoid foods that come with a nutrition label, natural whole foods will not have a nutrition label
- Stick to the parimeter of the grocery store

*The services provided by BALANCED are not intended to diagnose or treat illness or disease. The services and resources are educational and supportive and are not meant to take the place of your health care Professional*

*Please remember that we are all unique and that our own individual needs may vary. It is important that we are listening to what our body is telling us and that we are recognizing potential food intolerances or allergies.*

*Find other great E-Guides on the website! And watch for the next fun and informative Workshops and Presentations!*

## THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME

Be sure to pop by the website where you'll find some great general and specific menu Plans and other great E-Guides including Menu Planning and Meal Prep Made Easy: Plan Prep Eat & Repeat. It is a great addition to this E-Guide!

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