



## Better Living for Texans July 2011



Denita Young  
County Extension Agent—Family & Consumer Sciences

### Eating Healthy Within Your Budget

Food prices have gone up over the last two years and there is little end to the rise in prices in sight. So, how do you eat nutritious foods while staying within your budget? This issue of the BLT Newsletter will focus on strategies to stretch your food dollars while still purchasing nutritious foods for you and your family.

#### Coupons: To Clip or Not To Clip?

Coupons have been getting a lot of publicity lately with a popular, yet controversial television show that depicts people saving huge amounts of money by using coupons. While the show has been the subject of debate over whether coupon fraud is being committed, the issue we'd like to focus on is whether coupons (used legally) are really beneficial to a shopper.

Like many things, the answer to that question is "yes" and "no." What do we mean by that? Well, if you use coupons wisely, you can save money, but if you use them carelessly you might find that you're actually losing money.

What is the key to knowing when and how to use a coupon?

One of the best things you can do when thinking of using a coupon is to compare prices with the name brand that goes with the coupon with the store brand of the same type of product. For example, let's say you have a coupon for \$.50 cents off on a name brand gallon of milk that costs \$4.00 while the store brand gallon of milk is selling for \$3.40. If you use the coupon, you are ac-

tually losing money because you're still paying \$3.50 for the gallon of milk instead the \$3.40 for the store brand. In this case, use of a coupon is not a good thing.

As you walk down the bread aisle, you remember you have a coupon for \$.75 cents off a name brand loaf of whole wheat bread. You notice the bread is on sale for \$2.50. The equivalent store brand is \$1.98. In this case, using the coupon is a good thing as you'll save a total of 23 cents by purchasing the name brand.

Some stores offer double coupon values on certain days. Taking advantage of promotions and being careful to compare prices will help you make the right decision in terms of whether to clip or not.

#### Easy Guidelines for Healthy Eating

Each month we will be discussing how to balance your food choices with the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. It doesn't mean giving up the foods you enjoy, we are going to explore ways to work those foods into a healthy eating lifestyle.

Remember, you must include daily physical activity into your daily routine!



#### Tips for handling food while on a road trip:

- Keep perishable foods on ice
- Don't let foods set out more than 1 hour in weather about 90 degrees
- Keep hand sanitizer or waterless soaps handy

Source: USDA "Handling Food Safely on the Road"

# The Importance of a Budget

You can save quite a bit of money by having a budget. It can be time consuming to go through your receipts for a month, but is well worth it. Take a look at your current income and expenses. You'll want to find out how much you're spending on groceries and identify the items you're buying. Are you buying non-essentials like candy, cookies, chips, and related items? Are you eating out often? Did you spend money on foods from vending machines? If so, you can make a decision to cut them out to free up money for more nutritious foods or to put into a savings account.

Once you have a good idea of what you have available to spend on groceries, you'll want to take a careful inventory of your pantry. Make note of what you have so that you can avoid making impulse purchases or picking up groceries that you don't really need.

Once you have a budget, it's important to stick to it and stay within your budget. A key factor in staying within your budget is to keep a grocery list (you will want to keep any coupons that you plan to use with your list). Your list should include items from the food groups and you will want to avoid lingering in the store after you have all the items on your list because lingering often leads to buying things you don't really need.

Before shopping, take a careful look at the weekly ads at your local grocery stores. This will help you to plan your shopping trip so that you save money, gas, and time.

## Making Your Dollar Stretch



1. Cook enough for several meals and freeze the left overs.
2. Cut fruits and vegetables and grate cheese at home rather than buying pre-cut and pre-shred items.
3. Buy frozen fruits and vegetables in large bags.

Source: CDC, Fruits & Veggies: More Matters

## Cool Snacks

During the heat of summer, we burn a lot of calories and work up good appetites. When having fun, it can be tempting to grab a quick snack that may not be the most nutritious or to try to cool down with ice cream, sodas, or a tall, cool glass of sweet tea.

Unfortunately, many of the food and beverage choices we make in trying to deal with the heat are not the best for our health. The good news is that there are a variety of foods that will satisfy our hunger and thirst while also cooling us during the dog days of summer.

A chilled pasta salad can be a great summer meal that will provide you with nutrients like carbohydrates to give you more energy and give a cooling sensation to help you beat the heat. In terms of beverages, a tall glass of ice water or a fruit smoothie can really cool you down while providing much needed nutrients.

*\*\*Here are a couple of recipes to get you started on healthy, refreshing summer eating!*

## Did You Know?

Planning your shopping trip beforehand can help you avoid using gas unnecessarily. By comparing prices at different stores in your area, you will avoid hidden expenses. An example would be driving 25 miles to save 10 cents on a gallon of milk. The amount saved on the milk does not justify the expense in gasoline.

## ***Is It Really More Expensive to Eat Healthy?***

One of the more common reasons that parents give for choosing to buy snacks that would qualify as junk foods instead of fresh fruits is the belief that fresh fruits are too expensive. But, is that really true? The reality is that the answer can be found somewhere in the middle.

While it is true that fruits can be very expensive if purchased out of season, they can be found for low prices if they are in season and if you do a little research and smart shopping. A quick comparison of prices for junk foods and fresh fruits will reveal that fruits are either comparably priced or less expensive than junk foods. Consider that a recent ad for a local supermarket advertised for a 10 ounce bag of donuts for \$2. The same store also advertised red seedless grapes for \$1 per pound.

The bag of donuts contains around 18 donuts, 360 calories per serving (6 donuts), and 20 grams of fat. For the same money, two pounds of grapes will yield more food to eat, 3 calories per grape, and .01 grams of fat. Another store ad promoted a one pound bag of cookies for a sale price of \$1.67. The same ad listed fresh peaches at \$.79 per pound. Again, the price is comparable but the health benefits of the fruit far outweigh those of the cookies and similar snack foods.

Fresh fruits can also be found in local farmer's markets, often for less money than the same item at the supermarket. Still another way to decrease the cost of eating fresh fruits is to grow your own. A home garden can be a great way to enjoy the fruits you love while also getting in some physical activity. A garden can also be a great way to enjoy family time and introduce children to a variety of fruits (and vegetables). Research has shown that children are often more willing to eat things that they've had a hand in producing, so involving your children (age appropriate) in the planting and maintenance of a garden can help motivate them to make healthier eating choices while saving you money.\*

In summary, the answer to the question of whether it is more expensive to eat healthy foods than junk foods is a resounding, "no." The keys to finding fresh fruits at good prices are:

- √ Purchase fruits that are in season
- √ Check your local supermarket for sale prices on fruits
- √ Check out your local farmer's market
- √ Plant a home garden

\*(Morris, J.L., Briggs, M., & Zindenberg-Cherr, S. (2002). Development and Evaluation of a Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education Curriculum for Elementary Schoolchildren. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 27(2), 250-260.

**Texas AgriLife  
Extension Service**

410 Tawakoni Drive  
Emory, TX 75440

Phone: 903/473-4580

Fax: 903/473-0252



**Italian Pasta Salad**

**Ingredients:**

- 4 cups pasta, cooked
- 2 cups blanched broccoli pieces
- 1 cup cooked carrot slices
- 1/2 cup red pepper strips
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup Italian salad dressing

**Instructions:**

Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate for about 30 minutes before serving.

**Cost per recipe: \$2.67. Cost per serving: \$.33.**

**Yield: 8 servings, Serving Size: 1/8 of recipe.**

**Source: [recipefinder.nal.usda.gov](http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov)**

**Fruit Smoothie**

**Ingredients**

- 1 large banana
- 1 cup fresh peaches or strawberries
- 1 small carton (8 ounces) vanilla yogurt
- 1/2 cup fruit juice

**Instructions**

1. Put all ingredients in a blender.
2. Blend on high until smooth.
3. Pour into 2 glasses. Serve right away.

**Cost per Recipe: \$ 1.42      Cost per Serving: \$ 0.71**

**Serving Size: 1/2 of recipe**

**Yield: 2 servings**

**Source: Adapted from: Pennsylvania Nutrition Education Network Website Recipes**

**The Pennsylvania Nutrition Education Program**

**Author: Pennsylvania Nutrition Program**