

# Tips to Spend Less Money on Food

Cost is something you may think about every time you spend money on food. This information will help you:

- plan your grocery shopping
- eat a variety of healthy foods each day
- compare and choose items that cost less
- store, cook, and eat food safely

## General tips

### Compare stores

If you have many stores that sell food in your area, compare prices. Some stores have an average lower cost than others. Think about reviewing ads (flyers) for the products you often buy. Some stores will match the lower price at competing stores if you bring in the other store's flyer.

Think about where you shop and how much it will cost to get to and from the store. If you travel a long distance or go to many stores to buy food, you might spend the money you save on groceries on transportation. Think about your best option.

### Discount days

Some food stores have regular discount days each month or special discount days. On these days the stores offer a percentage savings (like 10 or 15%) off your total grocery bill. You can save money buying lower priced items on these days.

### Compare prices

At the store, compare brand names, store brands, and generic brands to get the lowest price.



Bring a calculator to the grocery store. Use it to add up how much you're spending as you put items in your cart. You can also use it to figure out the unit price per item.

**Unit price** is the best way to compare the cost of similar food items. The unit price tells you the cost per 100 g, kilogram, pound, litre, or other unit of weight or volume. It's usually listed on the shelf price tag.

65453692011		
ABC Brand Bran Cereal		
400 g		209515
5RC	5.79	1.45
		PER 100 g

When you compare the cost of one product to another, make sure you're comparing the same amount of food.

When the unit price listed on the shelf price tag is for the same amount (e.g., per 100 g) it's easy to compare prices.

Cereal	Unit Price per 100 g
Brand A	\$0.76/ 100 g
Brand B	\$1.00/ 100 g
<b>Brand A is the best buy.</b>	

When the unit price isn't listed on the shelf price tag, you'll need to calculate the unit price to compare prices. Follow the steps below to compare items per 100 g.



Cereal	1. Divide cost of item by size	2. Multiply the result by 100 g	Unit Price per 100 g
Brand C	\$3.99 ÷ 400 g box	x 100 g =	\$1.00
Brand D	\$4.99 ÷ 600 g box	x 100 g =	\$0.83
<b>Brand D is the best buy.</b>			

If you have a coupon for the item, subtract the coupon's value from the item price before you do the calculations above. This is to make sure you're still getting the lowest unit price.

You can get unit price apps for smart phones to help you see which item costs less.

## Value or family packs

Buying food in larger amounts and dividing them into smaller amounts at home may save you money. When on sale, if you can, buy large packages that will not spoil quickly like canned and dry-boxed foods. At home, it's important to store food properly so it won't spoil. If you have to throw food away, it won't save you money.

## Bulk foods bins

Buying foods in bulk bins may cost less. Compare the unit price of the bulk food to the packaged item. You may save money because you can buy only the amount of food you need.

## Before shopping for food

### Meal planning

**Step 1:** Start by reviewing your schedule. Think about your family's activities, work schedules and time, when you decide what foods to buy and what you'll prepare. Some weeks may be busier than others. This may affect the type of foods you buy as you'll have less time to prepare meals.



**Step 2:** Check your cupboards, fridge, and freezer to see what foods you already have. Use these foods when planning your menu.

**Step 3:** Make a grocery list. Check store flyers to see if you can buy lower-cost items to use in your menu.

### Should you make it or buy it?

You can buy some foods partially or fully-prepared. When you plan your menu, there might be some prepared foods you buy to save time. Prepared foods may cost more, but the time you save may be worth the extra cost. For example: A cooked rotisserie chicken might cost more than one you have to cook yourself but will save you time.

Sometimes prepared foods may cost the same or less. For example: If you need to shred cheese for a casserole and shredded cheese is a lower price than block cheese; the shredded cheese will save you time and money.

## Shop for healthy foods

Make healthy food choices to get the most nutrition for your money. Think about your family's food preferences when you make changes to eat more healthy foods. However, buying some healthy food may cost more.

Below are some tips to choose healthier foods. For more information, go to Health Canada's website, [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca), and search for *Tips for Healthy Eating*.

## Vegetables and fruits

### Frozen:

- Buy frozen vegetables and fruits. They're just as nutritious as fresh, and store longer.
- Choose plain frozen vegetables. The vegetables sold with added sauces may be higher in fat, sugar, and salt.
- Larger bags of frozen vegetables and fruits may have a lower unit price than smaller bags.

### Canned:

- Buy canned fruit packed in its own juice or water.
- Look for canned vegetables labelled *no added salt* or *low sodium (salt)*.

### Fresh:

- Buy fresh vegetables and fruits when they're on sale.
- Choose varieties with a lower unit price or buy different types of vegetables or fruits.
- Only buy amounts you can use before spoiling, or freeze to enjoy at a later date.
- Buying food in season will get you fresher taste, but not always a lower price. Compare prices between fresh, frozen, and canned food.



## Grain foods



Compare prices to see if you can buy whole wheat or whole grain breads, crackers, and pasta at the same or a lower price than refined products. Whole grains provide more nutrients and are healthier choices than refined grains.

Breads and flatbreads like naans, pitas, and tortillas can be frozen and used at a later date if you can store them. Buy on sale and if possible, buy them in bulk and stock up.

Packaged seasoned rice and pasta side dish mixes often contain more sodium and fat. These may cost more than plain rice and pasta. Adding your own low-sodium spices is healthier and may cost less.

Plain cooked cereals are less expensive than pre-packaged instant cereals. For example, a bag of plain oatmeal costs less than a box of packaged individual servings. When making your own cooked cereal, you can add flavourings like cinnamon or applesauce.

When the cost is the same or lower, choose whole grain higher fibre dry cereals with little or no added sugar instead of non-whole grain types.

## Protein foods

### Milk

Larger amounts of milk can cost less (or have a lower unit price), and are a good choice if you're able to use it before the best before date.

1% Milk	Divide cost of item by size (Litres)	Unit Price per 1 Litre
1 Litre carton	$\$1.52 \div 1 = \$1.52$	\$1.52
4 Litre jug	$\$4.54 \div 4 = \$1.14$	\$1.14
<b>The 4 Litre jug is the best buy.</b>		

Canada's Food Guide recommends choosing skim, 1%, or 2% milk most often.

If you use fortified soy beverage, compare the price of fresh to the shelf-stable kind.

## Cheese

For cheese, look for lower fat (20% M.F. or less) on the label. Compare prices between lower fat cheese and regular cheese and buy lower fat, when possible.

Compare the price of block to shredded cheese. Slicing or shredding your own cheese may cost less if the grated or sliced versions aren't on sale.

## Yogurt

Yogurt in the large tub may be a lower cost than buying several single-serve sizes. Yogurt with 2% M.F. or less is a healthier choice, so look for lower prices on these.



## Beans, peas, and lentils

Dried beans, lentils, and split peas are less expensive than canned beans or using meat. If you have time to cook beans, they'll cost less.

If you buy canned beans and lentils, look for brands with no salt added, or rinse regular types under water to remove some of the sodium (salt).

## Eggs

Eggs are usually lower cost than meat. Check that the shells aren't broken, so you don't pay for eggs that you can't use.



## Peanuts, nuts, and seeds

Buy peanut butter or other nut butters. When it's the same or lower price, choose nut butters with less added salt and sugar, as they're healthier.

## Meat, poultry, and fish

Canned tuna and salmon may cost less than fresh fish. Canned tuna packed in water contains less fat than oil packed.



Frozen fish can be less expensive than fresh. Plain fish is usually a healthier choice as it's lower in fat and sodium than battered fish.

When buying meat, poultry, or fish, the amount of preparation before sale will affect the price. For example, boneless, skinless, fresh fish may cost more than one that has skin and bones.

Compare the price of ground meats which contain different amounts of fat like regular, medium, lean, and extra lean. The lower the percent (%) fat, the more meat you will have when cooked. Using leaner (lower % fat) meats means you'll eat less unhealthy fat. Look for sales on leaner cuts of ground beef.

Ground Meat	% Fat
Extra lean	10
Lean	17
Medium	23
Regular	30



Lunch meat or packaged meat like hot dogs, salami, and pepperoni can be high in sodium and fat. There are some lower sodium and leaner meats available. Compare prices and when you can, choose ones that are lower in sodium and fat.

## Water

Bottled water is more expensive than water from your tap. You also have to pay a deposit on each bottle you buy, which adds to the cost. If your tap water is safe to drink, buy a reusable water bottle to use every day. If you can't drink your tap water, buy the largest bottles you can store and pour into your water bottle. Make water your drink of choice.



## Food safety and storage

**Check the “best before” date and choose items with the latest dates.** Items close to the “best before” date may be priced lower. Only buy items you can use before the “best before” date. For more information go to Health Canada's website, [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca) and search for *Best Before and Expiration Dates on Foods—What do they mean?*

**Never buy dented, bulging, or leaking cans of food.** These foods may be spoiled.

**At home, arrange and store food safely so food won't spoil and money won't be wasted.**

Organize your fridge, freezer, and cupboards regularly so you know what you have on hand when menu planning. After shopping, place newer items at the back of the shelf and move older items to the front, so they can be used first. Make sure you use the items with the shortest “best before” dates first.



Store vegetables and fruits, whole and unwashed, until ready to use, to help them last longer.

Put meat, poultry, and fish in the fridge as soon as you bring them home from the store. Put them on a dish on the bottom shelf so juices don't drip onto other foods. Any extra meat, poultry, and fish that won't be used within 1–2 days should be frozen to use later.



When storing leftovers in the fridge or freezer, place in see-through containers or label them. Date the containers so you can use them before they spoil.

## For more information

Canada's Food Guide is found here: [Canada.ca/FoodGuide](http://Canada.ca/FoodGuide)

On [healthyeatingstartshere.ca](http://healthyeatingstartshere.ca) search for *Choose and Prepare Healthy Food, Weekly Menu Planner, Healthy Grocery List, Meal Planning, and Reading Labels.*

For more tips, go to Health Canada's website, [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca) and search for resources like *Meal planning, Tips for healthy eating, Healthier grocery shopping, and Safe food storage.*