

Five ways to eat healthy, even on a tight budget

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MILWAUKEE — Junk food may be cheap, and of course it's not your healthiest option, but — with some planning and knowledge of farmers markets and where to look in the grocery store — you can bring the cost of eating healthier well within range. Here are five ways:

1. Bulk up and go private. Skip packaged products and scoop dried soups, pasta, nuts and grains from the bulk bins that most grocery and health food stores and produce markets now feature. Buying by weight can cost 20 percent less than packaged versions, said Libba Letton, a spokeswoman for Whole Foods Market Inc., because there's no packaging. An extra benefit: Shoppers can get just the amount they need and try new foods inexpensively, Letton said.

If your item isn't available in bulk, look for in-house, or "private," labels whenever possible. Many grocers now carry in-house lines of organic or natural foods, and some mixed them in with other similar offerings, so be sure to read labels.

2. Shop in season. Follow the harvest and you can't go wrong in taste, nutrition or price. If a fruit or vegetable is in season, chances are it is plentiful and less expensive than items that aren't, said Michele Robi-

chaux, a vice president at food Web site Foodieview.com, which aggregates recipes from a variety of popular food Web sites.

In summertime, look for cucumbers, stone fruit and tomatoes. When the fall rolls around, try squash or apples. And then preserve food for later by canning or freezing. Make jams, jellies and even sauces out of the summer bounty, and then enjoy them when the produce isn't in season and is more expensive.

3. Plan ahead. It takes work, but planning your meals for the week ahead of time will help cut your grocery spending, Robichaux said. That's because you can focus on what ingredients are priced best, buy more in bulk and waste less.

"In order to really make a dent in your budget and really start saving money, it takes preparation," she said.

Foodieview.com includes a free weekly planner that offers lunch and dinner recipes to feed between four and six people, plus a grocery list that keeps costs between \$75 and \$100 per household, depending on local markets.

The bloggers who contribute to the site offer recipes like one for pulled pork, cucumber, tomato and onion salad and another for low-fat chicken enchiladas, and they teach such money saving skills as how to use leftovers in a new dish — the

pulled pork with a lemon grass and caramel sauce, for instance.

4. Skip meat. Meat can be a big expense, so dropping it even one night a week can significantly help a family's budget, said Ann Taylor Pittman, senior food editor at Cooking Light.

"It's healthy to try to go maybe one or two nights a week eating meatless, when you center a meal around grains or legumes, things like that," she said.

Pittman also suggests shrinking meat portions to stretch the dollar. Divvy a large portion of shrimp and toss it with other food like pasta to make it go further, she suggests.

5. Look local. Check local farmers' markets for fresh fruits and veggies in season at prices that can rival or beat grocers'.

"It's a really good way to eat locally, eat healthfully and — when the food is seasonal — you can get really good deals," said Margaret Mittelstadt, spokeswoman for Milwaukee-based cooperative grocer Outpost.

Also consider joining a local co-op, where you "buy in" to the store and share discounts and profits. The fee to join is often as low as \$25 a year, and some offer lifetime membership for several hundred dollars.

For help finding local co-ops and farm markets, check out <http://www.eatwellguide.org>.

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