

Healthy Eating on a Budget During COVID-19 Pandemic

by Erin McGraw
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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted much of our daily lives, including our budgets. Many families may be experiencing economic hardships and looking for ways to stretch every dollar. Americans are also trying to space out trips to the grocery store to minimize exposure to the virus. Erin McGraw, registered dietitian with St Louis District Dairy Council says with a little planning and preparation, you can make the most out of grocery store trips (or delivery orders) without breaking the bank.

Step One - Plan: Take an inventory of ingredients on-hand, and search for recipes that include these ingredients. Next, build a menu for the week's meals that includes basics like dairy, meat, grains, fruits, and vegetables. Creating a list will keep you on track and reduce unnecessary spending.



Finding ingredients that are healthy, budget-friendly, and family-approved can be a challenge. Milk is naturally nutrient-rich and loaded with vitamins and minerals, making it a ‘must-have’ on the shopping list. “It is readily available and contains nine essential nutrients in every glass, in every brand, from every store; making it valuable to have on-hand,” McGraw says.

Step Two - Purchase: Consider foods high in nutrients and low in cost; such as milk, beans, lentils, potatoes, eggs, peanut butter, canned salmon or tuna, oats; brown rice; quinoa, or frozen fruit and vegetables. Convenience foods that are pre-cut, pre-washed, or “ready to eat” are typically more expensive than less processed foods.

In the dairy aisle, it’s important to note that dairy doesn’t just do a body good, it also does a wallet good. When it comes to nutrition and budget, the best deal is the real deal – milk! At a cost of just pennies per ounce, milk offers a solid nutritional bang for your buck. Milk’s affordability can ensure that you and your family get the recommended three servings of dairy each day.

Step Three - Prepare: Double or triple recipes, and then divide leftovers into individual portions and freeze. This works well with soups and casseroles, which can be defrosted and reheated in a snap. Having a plan for leftovers, such as using them in subsequent meals, can also help stretch food dollars.

Keep in mind that most dairy products can be frozen for later use. When freezing milk, leave a little space at the top of the container, because milk expands when it freezes. Also consider freezing milk in ice cube trays to toss into iced coffee. Cheese and butter can also be frozen for several months, as long as they are tightly wrapped to keep air and moisture away.

Milk, cheese, and yogurt have a place in a family’s budget and shopping cart. Dairy’s versatility makes it easy to incorporate into breakfast, lunch and dinner. Whether enjoyed as a snack or used in cereals, soups, stews, or casseroles, dairy can help round out a balanced meal and budget.

For more information on the health benefits of dairy, visit www.stldairycouncil.org or contact Erin McGraw with St. Louis District Dairy Council: call (314) 835-9668, or e-mail emcgraw@stldairycouncil.org For more delicious and nutritious recipes, check us out on Facebook at STLDairyCouncil

Recipes

Iced Vanilla Latte

This refreshing iced coffee drink counts as one of the three recommended daily servings of dairy.

Yield: 1 serving

Ingredients:

½ cup strong brewed coffee, chilled

1 cup low fat milk

2 Tablespoons Sugar Free Vanilla Syrup

Ice

Instructions:

Combine coffee, milk and syrup in a tall glass filled with ice. Stir until blended well. Enjoy! TIP: Consider freezing milk into ice cube trays and using frozen milk ice cubes in your latte.

Nutrition Facts: Calories 103, Fat 2.4g, Calcium 22% DV, Protein 8g

Cheesy French Bread Pizza

Are you craving pizza but don't want to wait for delivery? Try this quick and easy Cheesy French Bread Pizza recipe instead!

Yield: 4 Servings

Ingredients:

1 whole grain baguette (about 12 inches long)

1 cup of pizza or marinara sauce

2 cups fresh spinach, coarsely chopped

1 cup grated part skim mozzarella cheese

¼ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Cut the bread in half lengthwise then cut each half crosswise into 4 pieces.
3. Spread 2 tablespoons of sauce on each piece. Top with spinach and cheeses.
4. Bake until the bread is toasted and the cheese is melted, about 10-12 minutes.

TIP: If you don't have spinach, top pizza with any of your favorite vegetables.

Nutrition Facts: Calories 250, Fat 11g, Calcium 21% DV, Protein 16g

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