

Stretching Your Food Dollars...Strategies at Home

Stretching your food dollars doesn't begin when you get to the store, it begins at home. Spending a small amount of time planning ahead can save money later. Grocery shopping can be a real challenge, especially if you are on a limited budget. But because food is a controllable expense, it can be targeted for reduced spending when money is tight.

Be a smart shopper and get more for your money by deciding in advance what foods to serve for meals and snacks. As you plan your menus, follow these important steps:

- **Check newspaper ads for special sales.** Planning your meals around specials and seasonal foods can help save money. Compare advertised prices among stores to find where you can save the most on your entire shopping list. Buy only what you can use and compare prices with those found in other ads. Be aware that specials and coupon offers invite you to buy impulsively. Be sure the items you select are things you need and will use. Impulsive buying can blow your budget. Even at special prices and with refunds or coupons, some foods may not be within your budget.
- **Clip coupons.** You can save money if the item is one you would normally buy and if the item is less expensive than similar brands. Most cents-off coupons offered by stores or manufacturers are for the more expensive, highly processed foods or for foods in abundant supply. But using coupons for coffee, prepared foods, cereals, flour and flour mix products can save about 10 percent in most food budgets. Don't use a coupon to justify buying a food that your family doesn't need or that costs more than a store brand, even with the coupon savings.
- **Take advantage of seasonal specials.** Foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, are generally less expensive when in great supply; therefore, try to purchase during their growing season.
- **Consider food preferences.** When you serve popular foods, you increase eating pleasure and avoid waste. Make a collection of economical, nutritious recipes that your family likes and serve them often.
- **Plan the use of leftovers.** They can be used in casseroles, soups, for snacks and in lunch boxes.

If there is food waste in your household, ask yourself why? Are you buying food in the right quantities? Is food refused or left on the plate? Are servings too large? Is the food cooked properly? Encourage family members to help in menu planning and meal preparation. You will have help in making decisions that affect the eating pleasure of the entire family and increase a sense of togetherness and cooperation.

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