



**Ontario Home Economics Association**

*For Immediate Release*

## **Economical Everyday Meal Ideas**

### **Tips and Tricks to Help Stretch Grocery Dollars**

- Take 10 minutes to plan dinners for the week. Include lots of variety. It is one of the best ways to ensure you place healthy meals on the table. Make a shopping list and stick to it. You will not be as tempted to make impulsive or unnecessary purchases. Buy specials whenever possible. Use coupons to purchase only products that you really need.
- Meat and seafood are often the most expensive items in your shopping cart, so choose recipes that extend either of them in pasta dishes, risottos, soups and stews.
- Add whole wheat bread crumbs or oatmeal to ground meat, or place roasted root vegetables around a lean pot roast, to extend the number of servings.
- Be aware of the cost per serving, not just the total package price. Depending on the price per kilogram, lean boneless meat might be less expensive than meat with 'bone in'. There is less waste! One serving of meat, fish or poultry should weigh 50–100 grams, roughly 2-3 1/2 ounces – about the size of a deck of cards.
- Slow cooking tenderizes less expensive cuts of meat such as beef brisket, stewing beef and pork shoulder roasts. The lengthy cooking time in a slow cooker (which uses less electricity than an oven) tenderizes meat and allows flavours to blend.
- Buy meat in 'family packs', which are often priced less per kilogram. Separate, wrap well in freezer paper or bags, and freeze in quantities that suit your family's needs.
- Vegetarian meals are often budget-wise. Choose recipes that include kidney beans, lentils, chick peas or eggs to provide protein at a fraction of the cost of meat.
- Stock a budget-smart pantry and freezer. Items such as pasta, canned tuna or salmon and a variety of frozen vegetables are handy staples. To save money, buy the large size of products that keep well, such as rice, if you have a place to store them.
- Fruits and vegetables are usually more affordable 'in season'. But not always! Check weekly specials. Ontario grown carrots, cabbage, onions, beets, parsnips and apples from storage are usually affordable year-round. Ontario greenhouses provide tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce of excellent quality all winter. Check out road-side stands and Ontario farmers' markets for fresh and affordable produce in season.

- Buy a large can of tomato paste and measure what you aren't using immediately into ice cube trays. When frozen, unmold and store in a plastic bag. Each cube holds approximately 1 tablespoon (15 mL) for adding to soups, stews and other recipes.
- Don't let fresh herbs wilt in your refrigerator. Wash and chop them before packing lightly into small plastic storage containers. Store in freezer until needed to add to various dishes where herbs are cooked.
- Avoid food waste. Buy the quantities that you need to feed your family and keep tabs on what's in the fridge! Take refrigerator inventory often. Keep a list of leftovers on the fridge door to remind you to use them up in soups or stews to avoid spoilage.
- Stock up on high fibre, protein and complex carbohydrate-rich canned legumes, such as chick peas, to affordably 'boost up' salads, pasta dishes, soups and stews.
- Double up when making your favourite pasta sauce, chicken stew or chili and recycle them into a second meal, such as pizza, chicken pot pie with a biscuit crust or Sloppy Joes, to save time.
- Make soup. Start with leftovers and toss in your favourite veggies, pasta, and legumes and serve it with whole grain rolls or toast for a healthy, hearty and affordable meal.
- Be aware of how much you actually spend on food by keeping track of all purchases for a week or two. Remember not to confuse the cost of magazines, sundries and other miscellaneous items as part of the 'food' total.
- Always cover foods while they are cooking in the microwave. This reduces both cooking time and nutrient loss, which makes the final product a better value.

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*The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.*

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