

# Reduce your waist and grow your wallet

**JOANNE RICHARD**  
Special to QMI Agency

**T**rim the fat and you can cut your food budget big time — and possibly trim some real fat while you're at it.

If you're feeling cash-strapped after the annual Christmas buying frenzy, how about cutting your food budget in half to fatten up your bank account and boost your health.

"The grocery budget can be one of the easiest places to save money without feeling deprived," says Mary Carver, Ottawa-based professional home economist and member of the Ontario Home Economics Association.

The first step in eating well while cutting back is to determine exact food costs over a two-week period, says Carver. Remember to omit non-food items such as alcohol from the bill. Count in meals eaten out of the home.

Get the skinny on tweaking your food budget for a financially and physically healthier new year with these tips from Carver:

- **Smart planning is essential:** The first step is to plan menus one week at a time. Take inventory of what's on hand and what's on sale. From your menus and

advertised specials, make a grocery list. Avoid browsing for groceries — your mission is to find only what you need. "Over-buying and poor management of produce leads to expensive waste. Each trip back to the store adds to the cost and an empty pantry results in costly take-out," says Carver, adding that you should "avoid impulse buys by sticking to your plan."

- **Go light on expensive and less-healthy processed food:** "Why pay for added sugar, sodium and preservatives that contribute to poor health? Packaging adds to the cost," says Carver. Choose a variety of foods from each of the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide: Vegetables and fruits; meat or alternatives; bread and cereals; and milk or alternatives.

- **Put yourself on a cash allowance:** Studies show that consumers that use plastic generally spend more, says Carver. "It's much easier to be disciplined with a limited amount of money in your pocket. Advance planning provides a guideline on how much cash to carry."

- **Get in the kitchen and cook:** It's the surest way to ensure the best

nutritional value for your buck. "Eating well on a budget requires basic cooking skills. Designate one day to prepare large batches of comfort food such as soups, stews, muffins and cookies to freeze," suggests Carver. Also, make food preparation a family event to ease the workload and maximize the fun. Having homemade food on hand reduces the temptation to eat out.

- **Eat vegetarian meals more often:** Plant-based diets are increasing in popularity because they are economical and healthy.

"Discover quinoa, a complete protein, affordable, easy to prepare, super nutritious and yummy," says Carver, who recommends *The Vegetarian's Complete Quinoa Cookbook: From the Ontario Home Economics Association*.

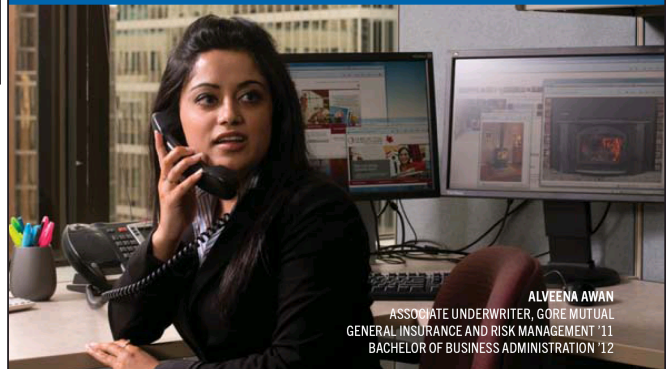
- **Cut food waste:** Forty percent of food we buy ends up in the trash. In Canada, we waste \$27 billion worth of food every year, according to the Conference Board of Canada. With careful meal planning and savvy food shopping, this \$86 wasted per person every month can fatten your bank account, along with the other dollars you'll be saving.

**Determine your food costs, tweak budget**



Want to cut your budget? Your food bill is probably a good place to start, as Canadians waste, on average, \$86 worth of food per person every month. FOTOLIA

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