



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Save Money on Groceries

by Mary Carver, P.H.Ec.

Consumers seek to control spending during a recession despite limitless supermarket temptations. It's easy to get distracted from a shopping list. Remember when shopping for bread or shampoo was an easy task? Such endless-choice aisles today are daunting. It takes discipline and focus to shop smart. Home Economists generally agree that the food budget should be the last area of spending to be cut so as not to jeopardize nutrition. Truth is that most consumers could use some Home Ec 101 tips to save money on groceries in any economy. Here are just a few:

- Determine what you spend on food; it may not be as much as you think. Food Freedom Day (February 12, 2009) is the day when the average Canadian has earned enough income to pay his or her individual grocery bill for the entire year. While shampoo and magazines may be included on your grocery receipt, such purchases cannot be factored into the price of food.
- Plan menus for a week at a time. From those menus and advertised specials, make a grocery list. Remember to check the pantry and fridge so as not to miscalculate your needs. Over-buying and poor management leads to food waste and every trip to the store adds to your cost. Avoid the 'empty pantry syndrome', which leads to expensive take-out options.
- Invest in a basic cookbook and learn to cook. *4 Ingredient Recipes* by Margaret Howard, RD, P.H.Ec. (Robert Rose) is an easy choice for those who want to eat well for less.
- Consider paying for groceries with cash. It's estimated that those who use plastic spend more.
- Buy real food from all four food groups. Choose fresh or frozen produce, whole grain products, dairy, meat, fish or poultry (or dairy and meat alternatives). Write your list in the same order as the layout of your store, making it less likely you'll get distracted by multiple trips past items that aren't on your list.
- Seek the best food value for your dollar. Reduce purchases of highly processed foods which are generally less nutritious than fresh or whole food.
- Buy less-tender cuts of meat. Slow-cook them to add flavour, tenderness and appetizing aromas. Why not put your slow-cooker and bread machine to more frequent use?
- Use coupons only for items already on your list; combine with specials if possible. Be aware that many 'incentives to buy' may not be the best value.

- Buy local and in season. Use farmers' markets or join a local crop-sharing program (quite an emerging trend). Cabbage and apples are affordable all winter - great for salads when imported greens and fruit are expensive.
- Buy in bulk if you have storage space. Staples such as pasta, almonds, brown rice, whole wheat flour, raisins and rolled oats may be less expensive in bulk than pre-packaged.
- Do it yourself for less. Prepared or semi-prepared food can increase the price per serving. Why pay someone to add a few herbs or a simple marinade to meat? Homemade salad dressing, nutritious granola bars and pasta sauces are much less expensive than prepared.
- Evaluate end-cap displays. An exhibit at the end of the aisle may not be 'on sale'; instead it may be a high-profit item for the store or an opportunity to clear products about to expire.
- Buy pure juice - fresh or frozen concentrate. Both are equally nutritious. Frozen can save you as much as 10 cents per glass over fresh. Quench your thirst with water, not pop.
- Check the price per unit on shelf labels to help determine the best buys.
- Look beyond eye level. Often better buys are located above or below eye level.
- Watch for purchase limits on the quantity allowed, which can indicate a really great buy.
- Ask for rain-checks if a store runs out of an advertised special. Use reward programs.
- Organic can be more expensive. Weigh the options. Studies show that veggies with the 'least likelihood of pesticide residues are onions, corn, asparagus, peas, cabbage, broccoli, and eggplant' (www.foodnews.org). There could be less need to buy organic bananas, avocado and pineapples as their skins are not eaten.
- Resist last-minute temptations at the cash register; some items may even cost less elsewhere in the same store, such as multi-packs of gum.
- Be vigilant at the check-out. Mistakes happen. Products can get scanned twice or identified incorrectly, or even left behind unnoticed.
- It's estimated that Canadians waste 10% of the food they buy. To save, transport food home quickly reducing risk to perishables. Keep your refrigerator at 4°C or lower to help reduce spoilage. Wrap food well. Organize your fridge to easily monitor best-before dates.

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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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