

**EXTENSION**

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**FCS-2430**

## Smart eating: balancing health, budget and waste reduction

*January 2025*

Smart eating is about making choices that promote health while being mindful of your budget and the environment. Eating a balanced diet with a lot of fruits and vegetables can be hard, especially since healthy food can sometimes cost more. Wasting food also wastes money and hurts the environment. To solve these problems, you can use smart tips to eat healthy, save money and waste less food.

**Planning Meals:** Involve kids in planning meals for the week by choosing a recipe and picking out healthy snacks. Kids can also help by checking what you already have at home, creating a shopping list and looking for store sales. Check your refrigerator, freezer and pantry before you shop, and stick to your list to avoid impulse buying and help reduce food waste. Try adding plant-based meals with foods like beans, tofu or peanut butter for healthy and affordable protein. Choose simple recipes that don't need special or expensive ingredients. If an ingredient costs too much or you won't use it again, skip it or use something you already have. Have fun experimenting in the kitchen; you might create something delicious! For healthy eating tips, visit MyPlate: <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes>

**Buying in Bulk:** Once you've planned your meals, consider buying in bulk to maximize your savings and minimize food waste. Seasonal and local produce can often be found at lower prices and better quality. Buy fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables in bulk and preserve them by freezing, canning or drying to enjoy throughout the year. Buy large bulk-sized packages of meat and poultry to divide into smaller portions that can be stored in the freezer. To safely store meat and poultry in the freezer, wrap it in heavy-duty aluminum foil or freezer bags and label the packaging with the contents and the date. It's also a good idea to retain the original package label, so you will be able to identify the product in the event of a food recall. For home food preservation resources and recipes, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation: <https://nchfp.uga.edu/>

**Using Coupons Wisely:** Another great way to save money is by using coupons, whether paper or electronic. Many stores offer digital coupons through their apps or websites. Additionally, there are free apps that can help you find sales in local stores or offer cashback, points or rewards that you can redeem later. However, coupons and rewards can entice you to buy items you wouldn't normally choose or buy more than you need. This can lead to waste if those products go unused. For example, if you've never tried pickled okra but have a coupon for 12 bottles, it's wise to buy just one bottle first to see if you like it. This way, you avoid the risk of buying a whole case that you might end up throwing out.

**Comparing Prices:** Compare prices for the same products at different stores, as you might find significant savings. Additionally, before shopping in store, check online retailers for price comparisons. You might discover that online prices are lower, even when factoring in shipping costs. The most important aspect of comparing prices is to understand how to calculate the unit price. This tells you the cost based on the product's weight or volume, not just the package size. For example, a larger box of pasta may seem pricier, but if you calculate the price per pound, it could be cheaper than a smaller box. However, it's important to be cautious about buying too much. While larger quantities may offer savings, purchasing more than you can realistically use before it spoils can lead to food waste.

**Cooking at Home:** Cooking at home is another great way to save. While \$1 deals advertised at many fast-food chains may make it seem like eating out is cheaper, a meal for two at a fast-food restaurant in the U.S., complete with drinks and fries, typically costs \$10 to \$15; for a family of four, it can rise to \$20 to \$30. In contrast, making a hearty pasta dish, such as spaghetti with

marinara sauce and a side salad, can cost significantly less and feed the whole family. A box of pasta, a jar of sauce and fresh vegetables can be purchased for about \$10, and you'll likely have enough for leftovers the next day. Keep in mind that leftovers need to be kept in the refrigerator and eaten within three to four days. To keep leftovers longer, store them in the freezer. Find a list of refrigerator and freezer storage times: <https://www.fightbac.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020core-four-practices-chill-chart.pdf>

**Tracking Your Spending and Wasting:** Keep track of your grocery spending to identify patterns and adjust your shopping habits as needed. Complete the spending tracker worksheet for a minimum of two weeks, or even a month, to gain insight into your spending patterns. Once you've reviewed your expenses, reflect on any costs that surprised you and consider whether there are areas where you spent money that now seem unnecessary. This awareness can help you become more mindful of your purchases, ultimately reducing impulse buys. Additionally, consider tracking the food you waste by logging every item you discard. Note how you disposed of it (whether you threw it out or gave it to neighbors), its price and the reason you didn't eat it. This practice will give you a clearer picture of how much money you are losing by discarding food and will help you make more informed decisions about what to buy on your next grocery trip.

Smart eating means making healthy choices, sticking to a budget and cutting down on food waste. You can save money and waste less food by planning meals around sales and what you already have, cooking at home, using a shopping list, buying in bulk and using coupons wisely. Keeping track of your spending and food waste helps you make better choices, so you only buy what you need and enjoy. Involving kids in meal planning is a great way to teach them about different foods, budgeting and why it's important not to waste food. With these tips, you can eat healthy without spending too much or wasting food.



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