

How to eat healthy on a budget



Healthy food can be expensive. Therefore, it can be difficult to eat well when you are on a tight budget. However, there are many ways to save money and still eat yummy, healthy foods.

1. **Plan your meals**

Take time each week to plan your meals and make a grocery list of what you need. Also scan your fridge and cabinets to see what you already have, there are usually a lot of foods hidden in the back that can be used.

2. **Stick to your grocery list**

Once you have planned your meals and made your grocery list, stick to it. It is very easy to get sidetracked at the grocery store, which can lead to unintended, expensive purchases. For this reason, it is also important you don't shop hungry. As a general rule, try to shop the perimeter of the store first. This will make you more likely to fill your shopping trolley with whole foods. The middle of the store often contains the most processed and unhealthy foods. If you find yourself in these aisles, look to the top or bottom of the shelves rather than straight ahead. The most expensive items are usually placed at eye level. Better yet, find your local green grocer or market – these are usually cheaper than major chains.

3. **Buy whole foods**

Buying whole fruit and vegetables is less expensive and healthier than buying pre-cut, bagged, and canned produce. You have to do more prep work, but in the long run you can save money, and you know exactly what is going into your meals. It is also important to buy seasonal produce, which is much more cost effective than out of season produce that has been imported.

4. **Cook large portions and use your leftovers**

Cooking large meals can save you both time and money. Leftovers can be used for lunches or frozen in single-portion sizes to be enjoyed later on. Leftovers usually make very good stews, stir-fries, salads and burritos. These types of meals are especially great for people on a budget. There are many groups online which share slow-cooker and budget friendly meal preparation tips.

5. **Replace meat with other proteins**

Eating less meat may be a good way to save money. Try having one or two days per week where you use other protein sources, such as legumes, eggs or canned fish. These are all very inexpensive, nutritious and easy to prepare. Most of them also have a long shelf life and are therefore less likely to spoil quickly.

6. **Grow your own produce**

If you can, it is a great idea to grow your own produce. Seeds are very cheap to buy and with some time and effort, you can grow your own herbs, fruits and vegetables. Having a continuous supply at home saves you money, tastes fresher, and is better for you. If you're unsure about growing produce, start with herbs – these are easy to grow and will enable you to use just what you need, eliminating food waste as well as the price tag of store-bought herbs.

Your brain matters

Looking after your brain health is particularly important once you reach middle age as this is when changes start to occur in the brain. Scientific research suggests that certain lifestyle and health factors are good for the brain and can help reduce a person's risk for dementia and other chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.



Start today by including these simple changes into your daily life:

Mental stimulation: Keeping your brain active is important to keep it functioning well. Scientists have found that challenging the brain with new activities helps to build new brain cells and strengthen connections between them. As we grow older we tend to prefer doing tasks that we are familiar with, but the brain benefits by having to tackle something it doesn't know. It could be learning a new language, taking up a new sport, taking a course in something you have always wanted to do, or trying out a new word puzzle. You could also experiment with things that require manual dexterity as well as mental effort, such as drawing, painting, and other crafts.

Physical exercise: Research shows that using your muscles also helps your mind. Regular physical activity is associated with better brain function and reduced risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Exercise gives our brain a healthy boost and also reduces the risk of high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and high cholesterol, which are associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

Build social networks: To help look after your brain health it is important to be social with people whose company you enjoy and in ways that interest you. Strong social ties have been associated with a lower risk of dementia, as well as lower blood pressure and longer life expectancy. Research suggests that social activities that involve mental activity and physical activity, such as dancing and team sports for example, provide even greater benefit for brain health and reducing the risk of dementia.

Look after your heart: Research indicates that having diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, and not treating them effectively, can damage the blood vessels in the brain, affecting brain function and thinking skills. Obesity is also associated with increased risk for dementia. Look after your heart by getting a regular health check and following the advice of your health professional.

Tuna and sweet potato bake

This tuna and sweet potato bake is the perfect healthier option when you are craving comfort food on cold winter nights.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- ▶ 2 x 185g cans tuna in springwater, drained, flaked
- ▶ 1 x medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1cm slices (about 400g)
- ▶ 2 x tablespoons olive oil
- ▶ 1 x 400g can crushed tomatoes
- ▶ 2 x tablespoons of tomato paste
- ▶ 3 x cloves garlic, crushed
- ▶ ½ x teaspoon of dried oregano
- ▶ 1 x sprig of rosemary, finely chopped
- ▶ 2 x large carrots, peeled and chopped
- ▶ 2 x red capsicum, deseeded and cut into chunks
- ▶ 1 x large onion, finely diced
- ▶ ½ x cup of grated tasty cheese
- ▶ sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C.
2. Spread the sweet potato, carrot and red capsicum in a single layer onto a greased baking tray, drizzle with a little olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast for 20 – 30 minutes.
3. Sauté the onion in the remaining olive oil until softened. Add the crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, garlic, oregano and rosemary. Add the tuna, and simmer on medium heat for several minutes.
4. Arrange half the roast vegetables in an ovenproof dish. Cover with the tuna sauce.
5. Top with remaining vegetables, and sprinkle with grated cheese.
6. Bake for about 20 minutes or until the cheese is melted and golden.
7. Serve with a green salad.



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