



The Neighbourhood Hub

Eating Well on a Budget

With Recipes

Mackay Regional Financial Wellbeing Service

Phone: 07 4957 2626

venetiaa@tnhub.org.au

Eating Well on a (Very) Tight Budget

Want to trim your grocery bill?

The grocery store can be a dangerous place: The shelves stocked high with chips and cookies (placed just right at eye level); family-sized frozen meals and kid-friendly boxed lunches; and aisles full of tempting and (supposedly thrifty offers like that buy-one-get-one-free sale on heat-and-eat chicken tenders).

If you are trying to live frugally, prepacked convenience foods can cause havoc to your budget. Ask yourself: How often have you gone to the store for “just a few things” and checked out with a cartful of impulse purchases or so-called bargains? I challenge you as a reader to try living on a grocery budget of only \$70 a week. Sound impossible?

Planning is Key

So, you have \$70 and an empty refrigerator. But wait – before you dash off to the nearest grocery store, you should know what you’re going to buy, how much of it you’re going to buy, and – maybe most importantly – what you’re going to do with it when you get it home.

Planning is key to your budget; you’ll need to make a list of everything you’ll require to create a week’s worth of healthy living. Buy things you like and buy things that can create multiple meals. Also plan on using left overs – these can make great lunches. I suggest splitting your budget 3 ways:

- **Protein (\$20).** Buy reasonably priced items that you can use in a variety of ways. For example, if you buy a whole chicken, you can roast it for dinner one day and use the left overs in a pasta or a salad the next day. You can even use the inedible and/or less appetizing parts (bones, innards, neck, etc.) to create homemade chicken stock. Minced meat, eggs and canned tuna are good choices, too.
- **Produce (\$30).** Buy fruits and vegetables that are in-season – they’re much cheaper. And avoid buying expensive items packaged for convenience like sliced mushrooms or prepacked salad kits. Canned or frozen veggies are okay, too – but again, keep things basic. Buy the can of peeled whole tomatoes but avoid the can of peeled whole tomatoes with garlic, onions, and Italian seasonings.
- **Bread, cereals, rice, and pasta (\$20).** The great thing about this category is that many of the items can be used for more than one meal – for example, a bag of rice will probably last you a week or more; ditto for a large box of, say, elbow macaroni or spaghetti. Buy a jar of peanut butter and a loaf of wheat bread, and you’ve got a go-to lunch option. Beans and rice can make a great side dish or a main meal.

Be a Savvy Shopper

If you're going to make it out of the store without going over your \$70 budget, you'll need more than a grocery list. You'll need to plan your route, from the produce department to the meat counter for efficient use of fuel. You'll need to scan your newspaper or online stores for the best prices. You'll also need to prepare yourself for store displays overflowing with tempting deals on stuff you don't need.

In short, be prepared. Here are a few ways you can plan a budget-friendly shopping experience:

- **Compare prices.** Chances are you get weekly grocery ads in the mail or the newspaper. Read them. Find out which store is running a sale - but also keep in mind that if you go to one store for, say, \$5 T-bones, it may be a bad idea to buy your milk and eggs there, too. Stores often run specials on a few items to get you into the store, knowing that you'll end up buying your regular groceries there too. So, they mark up the milk and eggs just enough to make your T-bone savings insubstantial. Pick your sale(s), shop them, and then go to another store that offers low prices on non-sale items.
- **Don't take the kids.** Avoid food-related showdowns, meltdowns, and power struggles: Leave the kids at home, if possible.
- **Shop the perimeter.** Most savvy, health-conscious shoppers know that the outer rim of the grocery store is the place to find healthy, wallet-friendly fare. The inner aisles of grocery stores are lined with prepared, packaged, and expensive products. Stick to the outside - that's where they keep the fruits, veggies, and fresh meat.
- **Spice it up.** Spices and herbs are a great way to add variety to your weekly menu without breaking the bank. A dash of curry powder, a handful of fresh basil or cilantro, or a couple of bay leaves will add tons of flavors to your meals.
- **Online Grocery Shopping.** Online grocery shopping is a good way to budget as you only buy what you need.
 - Free 'Click and Collect' option.
 - Fee for delivery.
- **Visit Farmer's markets.** Visit the Farmer's markets for fresh, local produce.

Easy Budget Breakfast Recipes

Basic Omelets

Ingredients:

2 large eggs

1 ½ of unsalted butter

1 small handful of grated cheese

Note: You can add left over vegetables to the omelet.

1. Crack the eggs into a mixing bowl with a pinch of sea salt and black pepper. Beat well with a fork.
2. Heat butter in a small frying pan on a low heat, and once melted and bubbling, add the eggs and move the pan around to spread them out evenly.
3. When the omelette begins to cook and firm up, but still has a little raw egg on top, sprinkle over the cheese.
4. Using a spatula, ease around the edges of the omelette, and then fold it over in half. When it starts to turn golden brown underneath, remove the pan from the heat and slide the omelette on to a plate.



Other Budget Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner Ideas

Scrambled Eggs and Toast is a cheap, tasty and quick breakfast meal for those rushed mornings. Chicken salads and sandwiches come as an easy make from the left-over salads and vegetables. Also, cheap home-brand cake mixture can be bought for under \$2 and takes less than 45 minutes to make. These make good little cut up snacks to take for morning tea, or if you're looking for a healthier alternative, a fruit salad always fulfils the hunger. Ask yourself; do you find yourself buying overpriced bottles of water at the cafeteria? If so, freeze a water bottle the night before. This acts as an ice block for your food also.

Budget Dinner Recipes

Bewibools Classic Beef Stew

Ingredients:

1 kg gravy beef or similar, cut into cubes

350gr carrots, cut into 5 cm pieces

2 small onions, peeled and halved lengthwise (leaving roots in tact on each half)

50gr oil

2 tbsps. Plain flour

600ml beef stock

1 tbsp. tomato paste

1 large clove garlic, crushed

2 bay leaves

Method:

1. Heat oil and brown meat well. Remove from pot. Lower heat and fry off vegies until lightly browned. Remove.
2. Sprinkle pan with the flour, stir along with the oil remaining in the pot, until the roux is light russet brown - this part is important as it imparts so much more flavour to the finished dish if you take the time to do this properly.
3. Stir in stock, tomato paste, garlic and bring to a boil. Add red meat and vegies with the juices and add bay leaves.
4. Pour into large casserole and cook in preheated 170C oven (150 fan forced) for about 2 1/2 hours.



Porcupine Meat Balls

Ingredients:

1 small onion
500g beef mince
2 tbsps. Plain flour
1/4 cup raw rice
1.5 tsp salt
pinch pepper
1 egg
1 can tomato soup
1/2 cup water

Method:

1. Peel and grate the onion. Or very finely chop.
2. Mix mince, onion, flour, rice, salt and pepper well in a bowl.
Beat the egg and mix into the mince.
3. Make the mixture into balls a bit bigger than golf balls with floured hands.
Put them in a greased casserole dish.
4. Mix water and soup together in a saucepan and heat until boiling.
5. Pour the soup over the meatballs and cook, covered in a moderate oven for 1 hour.



Easy Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients:

- 1½ litres water
- 1kg butternut pumpkin, diced
- 2 medium potatoes, diced
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 vegetable stock cubes
- 300ml cooking cream

Method;

1. Bring the 1.5 litres of water to the boil.
2. Place diced pumpkin and potato in the boiling water.
3. Add garlic and stock cubes and simmer until vegetables are tender.
4. Blend soup and return to pan, add cooking cream and stir.
5. Gently reheat and serve.

DID YOU KNOW? It only cost \$17.93 to make pumpkin soup that serves 5. When buying produce like potatoes, buy in bulk as they are cheaper.



Tuna Bake

Ingredients:

300g dried macaroni pasta

40g butter

2 tablespoons plain flour

3/4 cups reduced-fat grated pizza cheese

425g can tuna, drained, and flaked.

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 220°C/200°C fan-forced. Lightly grease an 8 cup-capacity ovenproof dish. Cook pasta in a medium saucepan of boiling, salted, water, following packet directions, until tender. Drain, reserving ¼ cup cooking liquid. Return pasta to pan.
2. Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add flour. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute or until bubbling. Remove from heat. Gradually stir in milk until combined. Return to heat. Gradually stir in milk until combined. Return to heat. Cook, stirring constantly, for 3 to 4 minutes or until sauce boils and thickens. Remove from heat. Stir in ¼ cup cheese. Season with pepper.
3. Add to pasta with tuna and reserved cooking liquid. Toss to combine. Spoon mixture into prepared dish. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until cheese is melted and golden. Serve.



Shepherd's Pie

Ingredients:

500g lean mince

1/2 cup of fruit chutney

6 potatoes boiled and mashed

3/4 cup of grated cheese

Method:

1. In a non-stick frypan brown mince, season with salt and pepper and mix through chutney.
2. Pour into a casserole dish, top evenly with mashed potato and sprinkle with grated cheese.
3. Bake in a 180c oven for 20-30 minutes or until cheese is melted and begins to bubble.



Apricot Chicken

Ingredients:

1 brown onion

1 packet French onion soup

1 can apricot nectar

8 pieces of chicken

Method:

1. Place chicken pieces in a casserole dish with soup and onion and season with salt and pepper.
2. Add apricot nectar and stir.
3. Cover and bake in 180c oven for 1.5 hours.



Potato Bake

Ingredients:

- 1 kg of potatoes
- 1 cup of thickened cream
- 1 cup of shredded cheese
- 1 packet of creamy cheesy potato bake

Method:

1. Cover the bottom of a casserole dish with a kilo of thinly sliced potatoes.
2. Mix a packet of creamy potato bake into a cup of thickened cream.
3. Pour this mixture all over the potatoes.
4. Cover with shredded cheese and put in the oven for 45 minutes on 180c.



Chicken Drumsticks

Ingredients:

1 ½ kg chicken drumsticks

400g can of condensed tomato soup

35g packet of French onion soup

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 180c.
2. Place drumsticks in an oven proof dish.
3. Stir together the tomato soup, French onion soup mix, and ½ cup (125ml) water and pour over chicken legs.
4. Bake for 1 hour or until chicken is cooked through.



Spaghetti Sauce

Ingredients:

2 onions, sliced finely

4 bacon rashers, sliced finely

800g mince

2 x 420 cans of condensed tomato soup

Method:

1. Add bacon and cook until brown.
2. Add mince in a frypan and fry the onions.
3. Cook until browned.
4. Add soup stir and serve.

Boil your favourite pasta until tender and pour sauce on top of it. You can also have this spaghetti sauce on toast as well.



Spaghetti Bolognese

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 brown onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 500g beef mince
- 1/3 cup tomato paste
- 2x400g cans diced tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 cup water
- 500g thin spaghetti
- Shaved cheese, to serve

Method:

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook onion, and garlic, stirring, for 5 minutes or until softened. Add mince. Cook, breaking up with a wooden spoon, for 6 to 8 minutes or until browned.
2. Add paste, tomatoes, oregano and cold water. Bring to the boil. Reduce heat to low. Simmer, uncovered, for 20 to 30 minutes or until thick. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Meanwhile, cook pasta in a large saucepan of boiling, salted water, following packet directions, until tender. Drain.
4. Divide pasta among serving bowls. Spoon over sauce. Serve topped with cheese.



