



Week 9: March 28 – April 3 **Meals on a Budget**

Cooking healthy at home on a budget is possible. Studies have repeatedly shown the tremendous benefits of family mealtimes, such as an increased intake of fruits and vegetables. Some studies have also shown that frequent family meals can result in a decreased chance of eating disorders and overweight development, as well as a decreased chance of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana usage in adolescent girls. One study suggested that family meals can enhance family cohesion, problem- and emotion-coping skills, and can improve stress and disordered eating-related behaviors.

Meal planning may take a little time, but in the long run it can save you time and money. Here are some tips:

- Plan your family's food budget each month.
 - We budget for house and car payments as well as utilities, so why not budget for food?
- Plan when, where and how frequently you intend to go out to eat. Include this in your food budget for the month.
- Plan a week's worth of meals and snacks.
 - Knowing what you are going to eat after a long, hard day eliminates the need for decision making. This can help reduce the temptation to order in, go out to eat, or go through the drive thru. Remember when you prepare foods yourself, you control what goes into your food. You can control calories, fat and sodium.
 - Tools, such as www.mypyramid.gov, can give you an idea of your family's weekly nutritional needs.
- Plan the use of fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - Since these products have a short shelf life, plan when you intend to use them. Having fresh produce during the first few days of your menus will make sure you use them before they spoil. Supplement the meals later in the week with frozen or canned vegetables.
- After planning your meals for the week, check to see what you have on hand to prevent over-buying.
 - Be sure to look in the freezer as well as the cabinets for food that you have at home.
 - Plan how you will use leftovers. For example, leftovers can be used for lunch the next day or frozen and kept for dinner the following week. Freezing leftovers is a great way to get two or three meals out of one.

The following page contains a meal planning worksheet. This worksheet will help you be prepared the next time you go to the grocery store.

Meal Planning Worksheet

1. Stay on budget.

Stay on a budget by checking the Internet or the newspaper for coupons on items you typically use. Compare coupon sales with the generic name brands. Even with a coupon, sometimes generic store brands are more affordable. Watch for sales where you can freeze the extra amount purchased, such as meats.

You typically shop for groceries at _____ and the Web site is _____.

2. Plan your menu.

Plan your menu based on the sales papers and the healthy meal guidelines learned during Scale Back Alabama. Also, if you make your list according to the rows in the grocery store, you will be able to get in and out faster, and this means less time for temptations and an easier way to stick to your planned menu.

3. Prepare your trip to the grocery store.

Before going to the store:

- Designate a time. That time is _____.
 - Pick a time to shop when you are not in a rush. This will allow you to have time to compare prices.
 - Do not go when you are hungry. This will allow you to shop from your list rather than your stomach. If you plan to shop right after work, try having an afternoon healthy snack to keep the hunger pains away.
 - If capable, try to shop without children. If they go with you, assign them foods to select. Young children can help pick out the fruits and vegetables. If the children can read, let them help pick cereal that stays within a designated amount of sugar. Scale Back Alabama recommends nine or less grams of sugar per serving.
- Gather your coupons.
- Take your calculator.
- Get your cash. Try to take your food budget in cash to the store. Leave credit cards and debit cards at home. This will prevent you from spending more than your budget.

4. Stay on task while in the grocery store.

- Stick to the list. Extras, even if they are inexpensive, can add up. Only go to the aisle that has something on your list. This will decrease your temptation to deviate from the list.
- Compare prices of generic and name brand items. Try to avoid buying items that are individually packaged.
- Check the “use by” and “sell by” dates on all products.
- Once you check out, double-check the receipt to make sure nothing was scanned twice and that all discounts were applied.

5. When you get home, remember to freeze foods you will use later in the week.