Buying FOOD and Planning MEALS For Your Family

Circular 770
University of Missouri Extension Division
The food bill of the average family is surprisingly large, usually about one-fourth of the income. Whether you spend more or less than this you want to be sure to:

- Have enjoyable meals.
- Have foods that will keep your family well nourished.
- Keep the food costs in proper relation to other family needs and wants.
- Be thrifty with time and money where you can, without giving up more important values.

**A Daily Food Plan**

For health and growth our day's food must supply many kinds of nutrients such as:

- **Proteins** for tissue building and repair.
- **Minerals and vitamins** for growth and proper body function.
- **Fats and carbohydrates** for energy.

Most foods contain more than one nutrient. No one food provides all the necessary nutrients in proper amounts to maintain good health. Choosing food wisely means selecting kinds that together supply all nutrients in the amounts needed.

**Milk Group**

*Some milk for everyone:*
- Children—3 to 4 cups.
- Teenagers—4 or more cups.
- Adults—2 or more cups.

Cheese and ice cream can replace part of the milk. Estimate 1” cube of cheddar cheese = 2/3 cup milk, 1/2 cup cottage cheese = 1/3 cup milk, and 1/2 cup ice cream = 1/4 cup milk.

**Vegetable—Fruit Group**

*Four or more servings including . . .*
- A citrus fruit or other vitamin C rich food.
- A dark green or deep yellow vegetable, important for vitamin A.
- Other fruits and vegetables including potatoes.

Count as a serving, 1/2 cup of vegetable or fruit or 1 apple, 1 potato, etc.
Planning MEALS

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In Grandmother's day, people thought the family was well fed if everyone got up from the table feeling full. Now we know the kind of food your family eats is as important as the amount. Research in nutrition has taken the guesswork out of selecting food for good health and optimum growth.

Everybody is different, yet everyone needs the same basic foods. Only the amount and sometimes the way food is prepared need to be different for various members of the family. Little children and older people want easy-to-eat foods, foods with very little seasoning and small servings. Teenagers and active men may need larger servings.

One way to obtain the needed nutrients in proper amounts is to include in Each Day's Meals the everyday types of foods listed below in the amounts suggested.

Add other foods to round out the meals and to provide additional food energy and other food values. Fats, sugars, and other ingredients, such as spices and flavorings in baked goods and mixed dishes, add appetite appeal. They should be limited to the amount needed to maintain body weight at a level most favorable to health and well being.

**MEAT GROUP**

Two or More Servings

- Beef, veal, pork, lamb, poultry, fish and eggs
- Use dried beans and nuts as alternates
- A serving equals 2 or 3 oz. lean cooked meat; 2 eggs, 1 cup cooked dried beans or 4 tbsps. peanut butter

**BREAD AND CEREAL GROUP**

Four or more servings, whole grain, enriched, or restored. Count as 1 serving...

- 1 slice of bread.
- 1 oz. of ready-to-eat cereal.
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup of cooked cereal, cornmeal, macaroni or rice.
Meal Patterns

Eating is one of our basic pleasures. A good meal is a blessing to be eaten with thanksgiving. Our established custom of eating three meals a day is a convenient way of getting food at regular intervals. If all the family sits down to eat at the same time, there is opportunity for good family relations to develop.

The following meal plans are like any basic pattern. They are a reliable guide which insures the essentials and allows for variations. Both new and long time meal planners find it helps to start the meal planning with a basic pattern and adjust it to the work and general living pattern of their family. You will notice each meal pattern includes:

- Some animal protein (meat, egg, milk or cheese).
- At least one fruit or vegetable.
- Some starchy food (bread, cereal, potatoes, rice, etc.)
- Some liquid.

### Breakfast

**FRUIT**—citrus fruit or other food high in vitamin C.

**A PROTEIN**—as egg, meat or cereal with milk.

**BREAD**—as toast, muffins, waffles, or rolls.

**BUTTER**—and sometimes jam, or preserves.

**A DRINK**—milk, cocoa, coffee, or tea.

The citrus fruit may be fresh, canned or frozen. Use whole-grain enriched or restored cereals. Serve children and teenagers milk each meal and adults at least one meal each day. Get up early enough to enjoy your breakfast. It's usually the key meal of the day.

### Lunch or Supper

**MAIN DISH**—as creamed tuna, bean soup, or toasted cheese sandwiches.

**A CRISP VEGETABLE**, tart fruit, or salad.

**BREAD, BUTTER**.

**DESSERT**—as fresh, canned or frozen fruit.

**A DRINK**—milk or other.

Casserole dishes, creamed soups, chowder, sandwiches or salads containing some meat, egg, cheese or milk are excellent main dishes for supper or lunch. A hot bread with preserves, honey, or jam makes a good dessert. This is a good meal for everyone to drink milk.
Dinner

MAIN DISH—as meat or a meat-like dish.
HOT STARCHY FOOD—as potatoes, rice, or noodles.
HOT VEGETABLE—as buttered green beans.
SALAD—or a relish tray.
BREAD, BUTTER.
DESSERT—as ice cream, fruit, or a milk, egg or cereal pudding.

A DRINK—milk or other.

Eat dinner at noon or at night when your family can enjoy the meal together. Serve only one dish of a kind, as one hot starchy food, one hot vegetable. Have little variety in any meal but variety from meal to meal. Sometimes serve an appetizer as soup, fruit or tomato juice.

A Dinner Which Follows the Basic Pattern

SERVE your meals on time and with cheerfulness and warmth. A comfortable, attractive dining place with a nicely set table encourages good food habits, proper table manners, and good conversation which often redeems a commonplace or ordinary meal. Take TIME to ENJOY your meals—and then FORGET them.
Timing - a Key to Tasty Meals

Food preparation should be timed so the food can be served as soon as possible after it has been prepared. Foods lose their fresh appearance, their appetite appeal, and some of their vitamins when they have to wait. Timing makes the difference between excellent food and just food. A soup that contains the best ingredients is unappetizing if served luke-warm. A flat wilted salad neither looks nor tastes good—vegetables done a half hour before serving and even coffee made too soon or too late can put a good meal in a bad light.

Money and Energy Costs

To make inexpensive meals interesting takes ingenuity, imagination and subtle seasoning. You might like to try adding poppy seed to a pot roast with sour cream gravy or a bit of horseradish. Try chicken baked with a bit of rosemary in buttermilk or add rhyme and basil to a beef stew. Use a wee bit of ginger with garlic salt in hamburger. Try adding prepared mustard to liver and onions.

Work smarter not harder. Think ahead and make your head “Save your Heels”. Ask yourself questions about your meal’s pattern; your seasonings; your way of serving; the amount of time you spend cooking, serving and cleaning up; and how long since you’ve tried a new recipe or a different way or place for serving a meal. Is there a better way for you?

Food Bargains

A bargain in foods may be a weekend special, the lower price of plentiful foods, or the best buy offered by different grocery stores. Some foods are practically always a food bargain because of the good returns they give in food value for the money.
Dark Green Vegetables such as kale, spinach, turnip greens, mustard, wild greens and other dark green leaves are exceptionally rich in vitamin A value and most of them, if properly prepared, have iron, calcium, riboflavin and vitamin C. They are excellent buys when in season and even when out of season the money spent for dark green leaves is generally well spent. Frozen or canned, they take comparatively little time or money.

Broccoli is another green vegetable that gives good returns in vitamins and minerals. Some count broccoli among the more expensive vegetables but when you compare the food value you get for money spent it is usually one of our good bargain foods.

Deep yellow vegetables, such as carrots, provide an abundant amount of vitamin A value and are available and inexpensive the year around. Served cooked or raw, they can add appetite appeal to any lunch or dinner. Winter squash and sweet potatoes also provide the same important nutrients, and sweet potatoes can be extra good buys because they also have vitamin C.

Cabbage is a bargain in food value because of its vitamin C content. It is available the year round, usually at a favorable price.

Citrus fruit and tomatoes are bargain foods for vitamin C because they have so much. Frozen or canned, citrus fruits and tomatoes are good buys throughout the year. Fresh oranges and grapefruit are most economical during the winter. That is when our diets are most likely to be low in vitamin C.

Dried beans, peanuts, and potatoes offer a variety of minerals, vitamins, and other food nutrients lacking in many diets.

Milk may seem high priced to some, but it gives excellent returns in food value for its money cost. It is our best source of calcium and riboflavin, a good source of top quality protein, and it contains other essential nutrients except vitamin C and iron. Certain forms of milk are better bargains in nutrition than others. Nonfat dry milk has about everything that fresh whole milk has, except the fat and vitamin A. It costs from a third to a half as much. Cottage cheese is a bargain for protein, and cheddar cheese a bargain for calcium.

Variety meats, such as liver, give us a wealth of vitamin A, generous amounts of B vitamins; they are a top source of iron, and furnish high quality protein.
When Planning and Preparing Meals:

Watch the Cost of the Main Dish

The main dish for dinner or lunch takes a big slice out of the food dollar. Protein is our so-called expensive food. If you include some animal protein (meat, egg, milk, or cheese) in each meal you get full use of the plentiful, less expensive protein in bread, cereals, nuts, dried beans and other vegetables. The animal proteins supply the missing links in grain and vegetable protein. So milk and cereal, bread and meat, cheese and macaroni, egg and toast team up well with each making the other go farther. The less expensive meat cuts have about the same food value as steaks but you need to plan farther ahead as they take more time to cook.

To keep the cost of your main dish down:

• Stretch your meat, fish, or poultry—2 cups of milk in white sauce plus a 7 oz. can of tuna fish makes a good main dish for 4 people. One-fourth pound of cheddar cheese plus one-half pound of ground meat makes 4 cheese burgers.

• Buy cuts of meat that give the most lean meat for the money. Usually a large piece of meat (half a ham, a large fryer, a large round boned pot roast) costs less per serving than small cuts. Fish fillets and steaks have little waste. A pound will usually provide 4 servings. Large birds have less bone in proportion to meat than small birds.

• Dried beans, peas, peanuts, and peanut butter are inexpensive, adequate main dishes when some animal protein is included in the same meal. Examples of this are bean chowder, lima beans and sausage, peanut butter sandwich and milk.

Use Plenty of Fruits and Vegetables, especially citrus fruits and dark green or yellow vegetables.

Serve at least one fruit or vegetable every meal.

Fruits and vegetables make meals look and taste good and provide minerals, vitamins, and bulk.

Buy whatever is in season and abundant. It will cost the least, taste the best, and have the highest nutritive value.

Buy in large-size containers if you can use them.
Consider the B and C grades as well as the grade A. The difference may be due to piece size, maturiry, and amount of sugar. The food value is about the same in all grades.

Check costs per serving of fresh, canned, and frozen foods. Avoid wilted products and those that have soft spots and decay. Defects or blemishes that affect appearance are usually not detrimental. Remember the biggest is not always the best.

Take good care of the fruits and vegetables you buy and make good use of them. Do not waste by ruthless trimming, overcooking, discarding the liquid vegetables are cooked or canned in, or throwing away of leftover fruits and vegetables.

**Avoid Waste**

Take proper care of the food you have. Store perishables where they will have the right temperature and moisture conditions and use them soon.

Try to cook amounts that will be enough for the family with nothing left over or plan to have enough remaining for another dish. Serve so there will be little plate waste.

Be ingenious in using small amounts of food—as bits of cheese, cake, egg yolks, or the fats and juices from meat.

Check the refrigerator regularly to avoid overlooking leftovers. Avoid extravagant use of ready-prepared foods. Consider using your time to reduce food costs.

Use family favorites (hot breads and special desserts) to compensate for lack of appeal in the main part of the meal.
Questions and Answers

How much should a family spend for food?

There is no definite figure. A family should spend enough to provide at least the minimum number of servings from each of the 4 groups of food—milk, meat and egg, fruit and vegetable, bread and cereals—and enough other foods to make the meals appetizing and satisfying. The choices of food within each group will make a difference in the cost of food.

How much does the average American family spend for food?

The average American family spends about one-fourth of its income for food. Many families could be well nourished if they spent much more or much less than that. It takes more than money to feed a family well but it is easier to have nutritious appetizing meals if you have ample funds.

Does a big grocery bill indicate a good diet?

No more than a good income indicates a happy family. It depends on the choices made and the care and use that is made of the things purchased. The amount and kind of entertaining done, the number of meals eaten away from home, the production and preservation of food; the skill of the shopper and the cook; all will make a difference in the grocery bill.

Can't you depend on your appetite to tell you what and how much to eat?

The smart person depends on science for this. He knows scientists have found out what foods will provide the nutrients a person needs for good health and that the lack of an essential food will interfere with the body making the best use of other foods. The scientists would probably say that not liking an essential food would hardly be reason enough for not eating it.

What's the advantage of 'keeping your eyes open' for foods and recipes you have never used?

It will help keep your cooking out of a rut and you may get a real thrill out of the new product.
Why keep a record of food expenditures?

It's probably the only way you can know where the grocery money went and the best way to begin to get more from your food dollars. Not all of us are interested in how much we spend but we all want to get our money's worth for whatever we buy.

Why carry a shopping list when you are used to shopping every week?

It helps prevent the inconvenience of an extra trip to the store or doing without a needed item. Too, the list can be a real brake on impulse buying. The food market is planned and arranged so thousands of items are displayed where the customer can see them and can pick them up without reaching or bending. Most of us need a brake to keep us from buying as if money were easy to get.
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