

# How to Create a Food Budget



Are you new to food budgeting? Whether you have budgeted in the past or not, it can be challenging to determine how much you should be spending on food. Unlike other items in our budget, the grocery budget can fluctuate greatly from month to month. Therefore, it can be easy to over spend at the grocery store when you are trying to stick to a budget. Budgeting for food, both at the grocery store and eating out takes careful planning, but this goal can be achieved! A general rule of thumb is: \$75 to \$100 monthly per person starting at \$300. For example, a couple would spend \$300 (not \$200) per month. A family of six would spend \$700 per month. This rule of thumb should be adjusted according to where you live and your income level.

If you are interested in saving money at the grocery store, there are several tips you can follow. The most important tip is to take time to plan carefully before you go to the grocery store. Planning will make all of the difference!

**Plan a menu for the week:** Planning is key to making a food budget work. Not only does this help with knowing what to purchase once you are at the grocery store, but it is a great daily time saver. How many times do you find yourself asking you're your spouse or family wants for dinner? Creating a menu will eliminate this daily question and the stress of what you will be having for dinner. Your dinner will have been planned and you have the ingredients all ready to go. When planning a menu for the week, look at your schedule. Plan easy meals for busy nights and then you will be less likely to go out to eat or get take out. This will also eliminate extra spending and help you and your family eat healthier balanced meals.

**Look at weekly grocery store ads:** While menu planning, take a look at the weekly ads from grocery stores. This will help you plan your menu. It is more cost effective to cook items that are on sale that week, rather than randomly choosing menu items that are more expensive. Stock up on sale items that you use often and can have on hand. Pro tip: Purchase meat when it is on sale and freeze it until you need it later!

**Make a grocery list:** Know exactly what you need for your weekly menu. Check your pantry and refrigerator for items that you already have on hand.

**Buy generic instead of name brands:** Most generic brands have similar quality to that of name brands, but can cost 20-25% less money.

**Look at cost per ounce:** Do not assume that the bigger package is always less expensive. Most grocery stores have a cost per ounce on their price label. Comparing brands and package sizes will help you make the best financial decision.

**Don't over buy on perishable items:** Buy what you will use, even if it's on sale. Avoid buying in bulk if you aren't going to use the items before the expiration date.

**Make your meals from scratch as much as possible:** Try sticking to the perimeter of the grocery store. This is where your produce and less processed foods are located. I recommend avoiding convenience meals and processed foods. Many times, these meals can be at home and you not only have more food, but you also save money.

**Preserve and store food correctly:** Put leftover items from recipes in the refrigerator or freezer them. Plan to use leftover ingredients in another meal before it expires or spoils!

**Plan for left overs:** It is just as easy to make more of a meal and then use it in a day or two. If you or your family does not eat left overs, try freezing left overs for a later date. You can also use leftovers for lunch. This will prevent extra spending by getting take out.

**Shop in season:** Produce generally costs less and tastes better when it is bought during its growing season. Plan your meals around in-season produce. You can find resources online to see what produce is in-season during which time of the year!

**Plan for the expense of eating out:** Include this in your monthly food budget. Eating out is more expensive than eating at home. If you are spending too much of your grocery budget by eating out, then try reducing the times per week that you eat out. If you enjoy eating out, try grabbing lunch out instead of dinner. Many restaurants have a lunch menu that is less expensive than their dinner menu. Many restaurants also have promotional offers, ask about their mailing list or if they have an app. If you have leftovers from lunch, take them home and eat them for a meal the next day. If you enjoy cooking and want to really cut down on spending, save eating out for special occasions. You can check restaurant menus online before you go, so you are not surprised by the cost of the meals.

