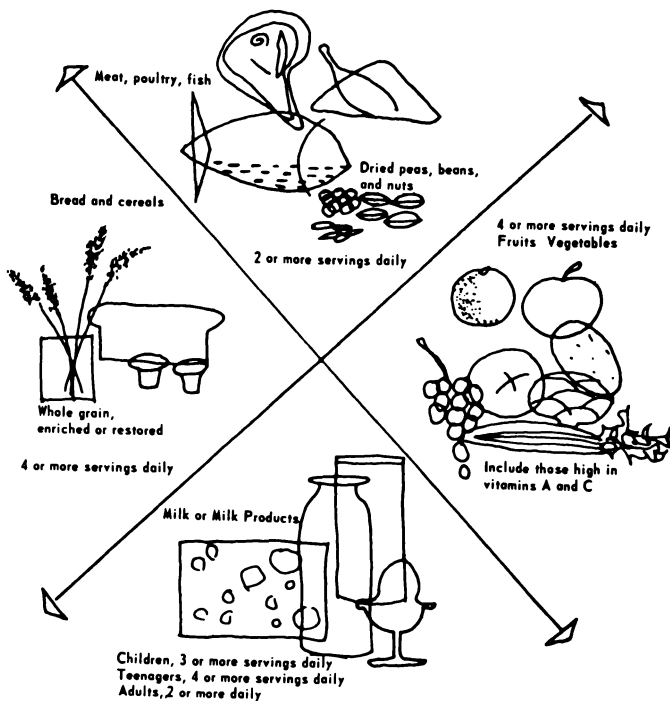


# BUYING FOOD



Extension Division  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
and  
State University

Publication 14  
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## A DAILY FOOD GUIDE

### Vegetable-Fruit Group

4 or more servings

Include —

- A citrus fruit or other fruit or vegetable important for vitamin C
- A dark-green or deep-yellow vegetable for vitamin A — at least every other day
- Other vegetables and fruits, including potatoes

### Bread-Cereal Group

4 or more servings

### Meat Group

2 or more servings

### Milk Group

Some milk for everyone

Children . . . . 3 to 4 cups

Teen-agers . . . 4 or more cups

Adults . . . . . 2 or more cups

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# **BUYING FOOD**

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Almost everyone is interested in saving money on the food bill. Food prices have been rising. You know that most items cost more than they did a few years ago. Incomes have been rising, too, and at a more rapid rate than food prices. In the last 10 years, the price of food purchased for use at home has gone up 22% while incomes in the same period rose 66%. Therefore, the portion of your disposable personal income going for food has decreased. That fact may be of little consolation to you when you're faced with a high grocery bill. Perhaps there are ways you can reduce the grocery bill by improving your shopping skills. This information and these suggestions may help!

## An Adequate Diet

An adequate diet is more important to your family than money. Their health and happiness depend on having enough of the right food. Planning your family's food supply helps you get the most value from every dollar you spend for food.

The kinds and amounts of food you need to buy depend on a number of facts about your family. Your answers to these questions should help you understand why your grocery bill is high or low and why it changes from year to year.

How many are in your family? Larger families (more than 4) tend to spend less per person for food than smaller families.

What are the ages of family members? As children grow older, it costs more to feed them. It costs more to feed an 18 year old boy than to feed his father. After age 20 the food cost per person tapers off gradually.

How many males and females are in the household? It costs more to feed men and teenage boys than women and teenage girls.

How active are family members? An active person needs more food than one who gets little exercise.

What is your family's income? As incomes rise, families tend to spend more for food. Although higher income families spend more for food, the proportion of income is smaller.

Do you produce any food at home? If so, plan to use these foods in family meals.

How many meals does the family eat away from home? If most family members buy lunch away from home, your grocery bill should reflect it. The cost of food away from home has risen 44% in the past 10 years. Eating fewer meals away from home is a good way to save on the total food bill.

How much time can you spend in the kitchen? Time available for food preparation also influences the kinds and amounts of foods you need to buy. If you haven't much time to spend in the kitchen, you will buy more convenience foods than someone who can spend a great deal of time on food preparation.

Is your family getting the kinds and amounts of foods that it needs? Check your meals with the Daily Food Guide on page 2.

### The Cost of an Adequate Diet

You can estimate how much it should cost you to feed your family for a week on a low-cost, moderate-cost, or liberal plan by using estimates established by the Agricultural Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

A description of the moderate cost plan is given in Table 1.

The low cost plan includes smaller quantities of milk, eggs, meats, fruits, and vegetables. This plan uses less expensive foods within a group. For example, in the meat group more dried beans and peas will be used. Cereals would be kinds to cook at home rather than ready-to-eat varieties.

The liberal plan includes a greater variety of animal products and fruits and vegetables. There is some difference in the number of servings in the various food groups but more expensive choices within the groups will account for most of the greater cost.

Which food plan is most like the food pattern that you use? After you decide this, you can estimate how much this type food plan should cost for your family.

Table I--Food Groups and Approximate Servings per Person per Week on a Moderate Cost Plan.

FOOD GROUP	SERVINGS PER WEEK
Milk (in terms of fluid milk)	Children under 10, 3½ cups per day Boys & girls over 10, 3¾ to 4 cups per day Pregnant women, 1 quart per day Lactating women, 1½ quarts per day Other adults, 2 cups a day
Meat, poultry, fish Eggs Dry beans, peas, nuts	9-13 servings (3 oz. cooked lean meat) 6-7 a week or in cooking 1-2 servings
Breads and cereals	Bread every meal, cereal once a day
Citrus fruits, tomatoes Dark-green and deep-yellow Potatoes Other fruits and vegetables	6-8 servings per week 2-3 servings per week 4-10 servings per week 18-23 servings per week

Table II--Cost of Food at Home for One Week Estimated for Food Plans at 3 Cost Levels. June, 1970, U. S. Average.

INDIVIDUAL	Low-Cost Plan Dollars	Moderate-Cost Plan Dollars	Liberal Plan Dollars
Children, under 1 year	3.60	4.50	5.00
1-3 years	4.50	5.70	6.80
3-6 years	5.40	7.00	8.30
6-9 years	6.60	8.40	10.50
Girls, 9-12 years	7.50	9.70	11.30
12-15 years	8.30	10.70	13.00
15-20 years	8.40	10.70	12.70
Boys, 9-12 years	7.70	9.90	11.90
12-15 years	9.00	11.80	14.10
15-20 years	10.40	13.20	15.90
Women, 20-35 years	7.80	9.90	11.90
35-55 years	7.50	9.50	11.40
55-75 years	6.30	8.20	9.70
75 years and over	5.70	7.30	8.90
Pregnant	9.20	11.50	13.60
Nursing	10.70	13.30	15.50
Men, 20-35 years	9.00	11.40	14.20
35-55 years	8.30	10.60	13.00
55-75 years	7.40	9.60	11.60
75 years and over	6.90	9.20	11.10

Add up the cost for each person (from Table II) in your family. Then make these adjustments for family size.

Number in family	Adjustment
1	add 20%
2	add 10%
3	add 5%
4	no adjustment
5	subtract 5%
6 or more	subtract 10%

Keep a list of what you spend for food each week. Remember to subtract the cost of non-food items from the total that you pay at the supermarket. Soaps, detergents, paper products, pet foods, magazines, drugs, cosmetics, and other non-food items are not included in these estimates.

Are you spending more or less than the estimated amounts? If you're spending much less than the low cost plan you should check with the Daily Food Guide to see if your family is getting all of the foods that they need. If you're spending much more perhaps there are ways to reduce the amount of money you're spending for food.

## Getting the Most for Your Food Dollar

Shopping is a challenge. It's difficult to decide which products to choose when you face about 7,000 items in a grocery store, and when new products appear almost daily. You want to choose those that will enable you to get the most nutrition for your food dollar.

Good nutrition is important but it's also important for your family to enjoy their food. Uneaten meals won't supply any nutrients. How can you get the most nutrition and enjoyment from your food dollars?

### Before You Shop

*Sit down and plan.* Make a plan for meals for the family for a week. Use the Daily Food Guide as a basis for planning these meals. For more information about meal planning refer to Extension Publication 363, "Meal Planning."

From your meal plan make a list of the kinds and amounts of foods that you will need for the week.

*Check specials.* While you're planning, refer to grocery store advertisements in the newspaper. Planning some of your meals around the specials offered on meat is a good way to stretch the food dollar.

A study by Economic Research Service of USDA of weekend specials for a period of one year showed that chuck roast was offered on special 20 weekends. You could save an average of 16 to 17¢ a pound by buying chuck on sale.

If your family likes an item that is on special and if you have adequate space to store it, you can save by buying it in larger quantities.

*Choosing a store.* Your choice of grocery store will also affect your food bill. Consider location, services, and quality as well as actual cost of food when making this choice. It's good to do most of your shopping where prices are lowest. Traveling miles to get a bargain on just a few items may not result in any savings. Stores that give credit or trading stamps may or may not charge higher prices. Specialty stores that carry a limited number of items may charge higher prices.

### **In the Store**

*Stick to your list* when you get to the store. However, it should be flexible enough for you to make substitutions if you find an exceptionally good buy. The substituted food should have the same food value as the food you had intended to buy.

Sticking to your list or making wise substitutions for items on it is important. Impulse buying makes the food bill go up!

*Read labels.* The label tells you what's in the package. It gives the name of the product, the manufacturer, the ingredients for products which do not have a government set standard of identity, and the quantity. For example, a label indicates that a product contains "sugar, egg white and egg yolk solids, salts, mono and diglycerides, corn syrup solids, imitation vanilla, and certified food color". Sugar is present in the largest amount and certified food color the smallest.

Packaging laws require that the content of packages weighing less than 4 lbs. or containing less than 1 gal. be stated in ounces. This information should help you decide how much you need to buy and compare costs.

The label describes the quality of the food. This information should help you decide which to choose.

*Choose a quality* which is suitable for the intended use. A few canned fruits and vegetables are graded. The various grades are alike in food value. Grade A is fancy quality and always the most expensive. Grades B and C are less expensive. These grades of vegetables, such as tomatoes, are suitable for soups and casseroles.

Brand names may be more often used as indicators of quality. One producer may pack the various qualities of a product under different brand names. If you are familiar with different brands you can choose the quality suitable for your use.

Red salmon and white tuna are more expensive than pink and chum salmon and dark tuna or bonita. You may want to use more expensive kinds for salads and less expensive kinds in casseroles and cooked dishes. Chunk, grated, or flaked tuna or salmon are cheaper than solid pack and are suitable for many uses.

*Compare costs.* To compare 2 foods, figure cost per serving. This type of comparison gives a truer picture of cost than price per pound in most cases. For example, if you were comparing the cost of frozen and fresh peas you'd need to know that you could get 4 servings from a 12-ounce package of frozen peas and 2 from a pound of fresh peas. Thus a comparison of cost per pound would not be accurate.

When comparing various cuts of meat, consider the amount of bone and fat you'll be getting. Count on getting about 4 servings per pound from boneless cuts; 2 servings from bone-in cuts; and 1 from bony cuts such as spare ribs. The number of servings of meat that you can get from one pound of various types of meat is shown on page 12. Learning to recognize a package that contains enough of a particular cut to serve your family will help you to compare costs.

*Buy in quantity* if you can use a large amount of the food and if the cost per serving is less. Remember that a bargain isn't a bargain if you can't or won't use it. Before you buy a large quantity of a brand or food that you haven't used before it's a good policy to see if the quality is acceptable to you.

Prices vary with package size. Larger packages may be the best buy. For example, one brand of cornflakes comes in eight 1 oz. packages (43¢), an 8 oz. package (23¢), and an 18 oz. package (43¢). Calculating the cost of a 1 oz. serving from each you'd find that the cornflakes in individual packages cost 5.5¢ per serving, in 8 oz. packages, 3¢ per serving, and in 18 oz. packages, 2.5¢ per serving.

You might ask what difference 3¢ makes. If a family of 6 had cornflakes for breakfast every day for a week (42 servings) they could save \$1.26 a week by using the 18 oz. package rather than individual packages. You could save 21¢ a week by using the 18 oz. size instead of the 8 oz. size.

*Be willing to try different things.* If you see a less expensive brand, try it to see if it is acceptable.

Don't serve the same things all the time. While beef is perhaps the most popular meat, don't neglect other kinds. Veal, lamb, poultry, or pork offer good buys and interesting as well as nutritious meals. By using all types of meat you will be able to take advantage of more specials.

*Know what you're paying for.* Many food products available today are convenience foods. You may or may not have to pay for the built-in maid service that you get with these foods. The service may range from very little, such as measuring of ingredients in hot roll mixes, to almost complete preparation of the product. Brown and serve rolls are an example of this. It's up to you to evaluate the cost, quality, and the time that these products may save you in relation to your wants and needs and those of your family.

*Choose the best values from each of the Four Food Groups of The Daily Food Guide.*

### **Fruits and Vegetables**

Buy fruits and vegetables at the peak of their supply. The prices of some fruits and vegetables vary with season. Apples are less expensive in late summer and early fall when the supply is greatest.

The price of canned and frozen fruits and vegetables varies with season, also. Just before a new crop is processed the price may go down.

Compare cost per serving of fresh, frozen, canned, or dehydrated forms to see which is the best buy. A one half cup portion or a portion usually served, such as an apple, a banana, or potato, is considered to be one serving.

Evaluate the condition of perishable fruits and vegetables and the storage facilities that you have at home before deciding how much to buy. Be sure fruits and vegetables are fresh. Vegetables that are limp or wilted have lost much of their vitamin C. Those that show signs of

bruising probably have lost vitamin A as well. Treat vegetables gently, getting them onto the table or into the refrigerator as soon as possible.

For a change and for economy, canned tomatoes, tomato juice, fresh tomatoes in season, green pepper, broccoli, cabbage and "greens", as well as cantaloupe and strawberries in season, can replace citrus fruits as sources of vitamin C. Apricot, apple, pear, prune, and pineapple do not supply much vitamin C. Juices from some of these fruits may have vitamin C added.

### **Breads and Cereals**

Foods from the bread and cereal group are important in the diet because they supply food energy at relatively low cost as well as several important nutrients. Some of the vitamins and minerals are removed when the outer layers of the grain kernels are removed during processing. The miller or baker may "enrich" the product by adding specified amounts of niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, and iron to make the nutritive value approximately the same as whole-grain. You get more nutrients for your money if you select enriched or whole-grain products.

Read the label to find out if a product is enriched or whole-grain. Virginia law does not require enrichment.

Rice which is labeled parboiled or converted has been specially treated to drive the nutrients from the outer husks into the kernel before the husks are removed. Parboiled, converted, and enriched rice are better buys than unenriched rice.

### **Meat and Meat Substitutes**

Foods from this group take more than 1/3 of each dollar spent for food. Fortunately, low cost cuts and varieties may have as much food value as more expensive ones.

Poultry and eggs are usually economical sources of protein. A large chicken or turkey is often a good buy because you get more meat in proportion to the bone. A whole chicken is less expensive than cut-up chicken or that packaged by the piece.

Beans, peas, and nuts offer the most protein per dollar spent and may be used as substitutes for meat. The quality of the protein is not quite as good as that from animal sources, however.

## Milk

How much milk does your family need in a year? You might like to calculate the cost of this quantity of milk.

Milk is available in a variety of forms. By using the most economical form or a combination of forms you may be able to save a considerable sum of money in a year.

For example, a family of 6 with 4 children ages 8 to 16 needs 1,643 quarts of milk a year to get the number of servings suggested in the Daily Food Guide. The following table shows how much it would cost to buy this quantity of various forms of milk.

	Price per Quart	Cost per Year 1643 quarts
Milk, whole, fresh	30¢	\$493
Milk, skim, fresh	27¢	\$443
Nonfat dry milk	10¢	\$164
Half fresh skim and half nonfat dry milk	18.5¢	\$304

## Fats and Sweets

Eat these foods only after you have had all the others your body needs and then only if your budget and waistline allow. Sweets such as sugar, jellies, cakes, and pastries add interest to your meals but are high in calories and may be expensive. If added calories are needed for growing youngsters and underweight persons, wholesome desserts may fill this need. Some of the essential foods for the day may be used for dessert in the form of milk puddings, ice cream, and fruit desserts.

Butter and margarine are equal in food value and are the only fats containing vitamin A.

Salad dressings made at home may cost less than commercial.

## Summary

To get the most from your food dollars, plan carefully. Consider the needs of your family and the amount of money that you can spend for food. Then carry out your plan. Make substitutions if necessary to get the best quality and the most value for each dollar that you spend.

But above all, enjoy good meals. Good nutrition is simply eating a variety of foods each day so as to get the necessary nutrients. It doesn't require a lot of expensive or exotic foods. A well-planned selection of everyday foods will do it.

SERVINGS OF MEAT PER POUND	
Approximate No. Servings per Pound	Types of Meat, Fish, Poultry
5 - 6	FISH: frozen sticks; cooked, peeled cleaned shrimp
4	BONELESS MEATS: flank, tenderloin, sirloin butt, strip, heel of round, ground beef, liver, sausage, frankfurters, sliced luncheon meats, canned corned beef and smoked ham POULTRY: canned chicken, turkey FISH: frozen, breaded portions; canned mackerel, salmon, tuna, sardines; frozen breaded shrimp
2 - 3	MEAT WITH MEDIUM AMOUNT OF BONE: ham slices, steaks, rib roasts, chuck, chops, rump roast, loin roasts POULTRY: chicken breasts, drumstick and/or thighs; turkey breasts or legs FISH: fresh or frozen fillets or steaks
1 - 2	MEATS WITH LARGE AMOUNTS OF BONE: shoulder cuts, short ribs, spare ribs, neck, breasts, plate, brisket, shank POULTRY: whole roasting-frying, and stewing chickens; whole turkeys FISH: fresh or frozen whole fish