



TIPS

USDA Food & Nutrition Service

Making the Most of Your Food Stamp Benefits

Using your food money wisely means more than cutting your food bill. It also means making sure you get good nutrition and eating pleasure for the money you spend on food. Wise use of food dollars is a challenge, requiring advance planning and the use of basic tools to make sound cost comparisons. Here are some tips to help you sharpen your food money management skills.



- **Plan meals first**, then make a shopping list. Use your list to save trips to the supermarket and help you avoid buying items you don't really need.
- **Choose a store** that gives you the best price and quality *for products you typically buy*. Make sure the cost savings from shopping at several stores justifies the extra time and transportation cost.
- Try to **avoid shopping when** you're tired, hungry or rushed.
- **Compare unit prices** to find best buys. Large packages, store brands and sale items are often, but not always, cheaper than other brands or container sizes.
- Use itemized receipts to help **track food costs**. This is especially helpful when prices aren't marked on products.
- **Make substitutions** for items on your shopping list if you can save money or get a higher quality product, *and* if the item will fit into your meal plans.

- Use **coupons** for products you usually buy.
- **Stock up** on store specials in reasonable amounts.
- Buy **store brands** and generic items when their taste and quality suit your needs.
- Salad bars can be **costly** - buy only those items you need in small quantities. Pick up basic ingredients - lettuce, cabbage, celery, carrots, cucumbers, onions - elsewhere in the store.
- Buy **bulk foods** (when available) for high quality, a lower price, and the exact amount you want.
- Make sure **convenience foods** are worthwhile buys. Some (packaged mixes, canned vegetables, frozen juice concentrates) can be good buys, while others (frozen dinners) cost much more than home-prepared versions.
- Avoid overbuying (particularly perishables) to **minimize food waste**.
- To **protect food quality** while you shop:
 - Pick up perishables (frozen vegetables, meats, dairy products) last.
 - Keep cold items together.
 - Minimize time foods are in the car.
 - Keep perishables out of direct sunlight.
 - Put foods away promptly.



Food Stamps Make
America Stronger

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