



KENNY AND JOANN

20 Tips for Buying Healthy Groceries on a Budget

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“How can I buy healthy groceries on a budget? They’re just too expensive!” This is another common question I get as a nutritionist. Although organic produce seems to almost price itself off of our grocery list, there are ways to find it cheaper. You also have to consider the long-term effects of the alternative. When we eat produce laden with pesticides and grown in nutrient-deficient soil, we weaken our immunity. We become deficient in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. And we manifest multiple physical and mental illnesses. This cost to our health is far more than just monetary!

Still, I completely understand the extra expense in the short term as well. I have compiled a list of twenty tips for buying healthy groceries on a budget. This is by no means an exhaustive list. The first five involve strategies for meal preparation. Tips 6-14 directly concern grocery shopping. And the last six indirectly save money by making healthier choices.

1. Plan a Week’s Worth of Meals

I’m sure most of us make a grocery list. Sometimes, we even plan a few meals for the week and add those items to the list. But, what if we just sat down once a week and planned every meal for that following week? We could go to the grocery store with confidence and a goal to get only the necessary items to make our meals and snacks for the week. Sure, we can be flexible, especially for sales and BOGOs of our frequently-used items, but when we have a plan, it gives us focus.

2. Prepare Meals and Snacks Ahead of Time

If you already have healthy meals and snacks prepared or easily available in the freezer, fridge, or pantry, you will be less likely to grab an unhealthy snack or junk food. (Junk food should not even be in your house in the first place, folks!) Preparing several meals and snacks ahead of time can also be a great bonding time with your spouse or kids.

Joann and I love to make our delicious Pico de Gallo together, which lasts all week as a topping for taco salads and burritos or as a dip for raw seed crackers. We also enjoy juicing vegetables most Sunday nights for a juice fast on Mondays. Always keep seeds sprouting, so that you can prepare and dehydrate raw crackers and use for salad toppings. Soak almonds, pecans, walnuts, and other nuts overnight



and dehydrate them for snacks or for use in desserts, veggie burgers, and sauces. Keep them in the fridge or freeze them for later.

A lot of people have been preparing salads ahead of time in a jar. You can use a large mason jar to hold the entire salad. Either pour a healthy dressing in first or save it on the side for when you actually eat the salad. Next, put in the tomatoes and cucumbers and other wet vegetables that will last in dressing for a few days, especially if the dressing has lemon or lime juice. On top of that, add the dryer vegetables like onions and peppers. Then, place in olives. Lastly, push in a handful of dark, leafy greens, such as spinach, chard, arugula, cilantro, or kale. Put the lid on and eat it anytime during the week.

3. Make Extra to Have Leftovers

Whether you make all or part of your meals ahead of time, make extra. This allows you to enjoy that same meal again for leftovers throughout the week. Or, you can modify it a bit and repurpose it for the next time. It may make a good lunch for the next day as well. Some cooked meals, like chili and soup, lend themselves well to leftovers.

4. Pack a Healthy Lunch and Snacks

Rather than go out for lunch during the week, save money by bringing your lunch to work. Those leftovers above might just do the trick. Or, some of those meals prepared beforehand were especially dedicated for your lunch.

One of my strategies for a healthier life is to eat all raw until suppertime. I start the morning with a large green smoothie, containing raw protein powder, raw super green powder, matcha powder, and a big handful of super greens mixed with frozen fruit. This easily lasts until noon, when I eat a fruit salad. For a midafternoon snack, I eat raw, sprouted, dehydrated almonds, pecans, or other nuts. About an hour before leaving work, I eat carrot wedges. Those all get me through the day until I arrive home to a delicious pre-prepared meal waiting for me. The evening meal has a mixture of raw and cooked food, but it is always fantastic!

5. The Freezer Is Your Friend

For preparing meals and snacks to always have on hand, the freezer is your friend! Those nuts and seeds that you sprouted and dehydrated can be frozen and pulled out months later, nearly as fresh as the day you stored them. Those meals you prepared can be frozen for later in the week or for a month from now if you got burned out on the



leftovers. A two-year study showed that in some cases, frozen produce retained more nutrients than when stored for five days in the fridge (1).

Buying frozen fruit for smoothies is a practical idea, especially if you have them every day. Also, the greens for a daily green smoothie can be a challenge to keep fresh. We buy a large box of mixed greens and immediately freeze what we're not using for salads in two-quart baggies. Every morning, I pull out a bag of frozen greens and add them to my blender. Do not let them thaw even a little or they'll get sludgy. Wait until the last second!

6. Buy Local Produce that's in Season

Local produce is usually healthier, since it is picked at a riper stage in its growing process. The produce at the grocery store is often picked while green and then artificially ripened during shipment. This process causes it to lose nutrients. Hopefully, you will be able to find local produce from a nearby farm or farmers market that is also organic. If not, see tip 14. Additionally, local produce has an immune system to resist toxins in your area. Eating it should give you that same immunity.

Also, in-season produce is typically cheaper. It has less distance to travel to the grocery store. Sometimes, though, they can still get a better deal on produce from South America, even in season. If you see a really great deal, buy extra and freeze what you can't eat quickly.

7. Comparison Shop Online Beforehand

Joann is the queen of thrift. She just loves a bargain! And boy do I love that about her! Before going shopping, she looks online for sales. We shop at five different grocery stores, so there is nothing worse than buying a bag of organic Fuji apples at Kroger for \$7.99 and then finding them at Aldi for \$4.99. Look ahead and pick out which store has the best price for each item on your list. Often, you will see a trend and you won't have to do as much research after a while. For instance, Aldi almost always has the cheapest organic apples, so Joann rarely looks anywhere else for those.

Our area has a Sprouts and an Earth Fare near each other, while Kroger, Publix, and Wal-Mart also carry the same organic items, so this competition helps lower prices for us. Even then, health-food stores are still very expensive on some items compared to grocery stores. There is even more competition online, such as Amazon and Thrive Market. Compare their prices as well.



8. Try the Store's Pickup Service

Joann loves the pickup service for some stores, especially if we only need a few items. This has several benefits. It is very convenient and time saving. If there is something heavy, she never has to lift it. She doesn't have to walk from one corner to another just for two items. She doesn't have to be tempted by all of the enticing items that are placed purposely to grab her attention. And, it doesn't matter if she's hungry or not; she can't buy extra food, since they only load what she ordered. Pickup service has great potential to save money.

9. Go Straight to the Clearance Section

We may not always go straight to the clearance section, but it's one of our first stops. Joann has found many bargains there. There may also be items in the regular aisles that are marked down for clearance. Be careful of expiration dates, though. Ensure that you can eat it before it expires, or freeze it when you get home.

10. Buy Extra When on Sale

When there is an excellent sale on any of your staple items, especially a "buy one get one" (BOGO), buy extra if you can consume it before it expires. If possible, buy lots extra and freeze what you can. For instance, we can and do make our own almond milk, but we have a favorite healthy brand that is expensive even on sale, but when it's BOGO, we stock up!

11. Get the Best Unit Price

Don't just look at the total cost. Look at the unit cost when comparing items. It's usually better to buy the bigger size if you will use it all, because it has a lower unit price. That is a better deal overall. Also, if you are comparing two similar items, choose the one with the lowest unit price. We love pure maple syrup, but it can be really expensive. We use a lot during the holidays, so we wait for it to be on sale and then buy the largest container with the best unit price.

12. Use Loyalty Cards and Apps

Who needs to clip coupons anymore?! They're all on the store's app and/or loyalty card! Sometimes, you don't even have to load them. Check out their apps before you head to the store to see which ones have coupons on your items. Load them if necessary. So simple! Some apps even have rebates.



13. Buy Store Brands

Every health-food and grocery store has their own version of popular brands. They are nearly always cheaper for the exact same thing. We love Kroger's Simple Truth Organic brand! Wal-Mart has Great Value Organic frozen fruit and unrefined, virgin, coconut oil that we buy. Always consider these organic store brands before settling on the higher-priced popular brands.

14. Look for the Clean Fifteen

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) puts out an updated list of the Dirty Dozen and the Clean Fifteen every year. The dirty dozen contains a list of the top-twelve, highly-sprayed produce. Their 2019 list includes, in order, strawberries, spinach, kale, nectarines, apples, grapes, peaches, cherries, pears, tomatoes, celery, and potatoes (2). Since these contain more pesticide, I highly recommend getting these organic whenever possible.


Now, their clean-fifteen list can save you money, since you don't necessarily need to buy them organic. This list contains, in order, avocados, sweet corn (get non-GMO), pineapples, sweet peas frozen, onions, papayas (get non-GMO), eggplants, asparagus, kiwis, cabbages, cauliflower, cantaloupes, broccoli, mushrooms, and honeydew melons (3). You still have to consider that they may not have been grown in nutrient-dense soil, so if the organic version is not much more, I would still recommend getting it.

15. Avoid Processed Food

How do you save money on groceries by avoiding processed foods? Per calorie, the price is cheaper for healthy produce than for junk food. Also, empty calories from junk food do not satisfy our hunger, so we tend to eat even more calories, likely more junk, to try and conquer that raging lion. Adding these unnecessary and harmful calories add up quickly and contribute to weight gain, not to mention poor health and low energy.

16. Limit or Omit Meat

Meat is expensive. No doubt. And if you must eat meat, please get it without the hormones, pesticides, and tainted feed. The best is organic, pasture-raised, which also applies to eggs. This way, the animal has plenty of room to roam and eats exactly what it was meant to eat. Now, this makes meat even more expensive. So, limit



your meat intake by having more vegetable meals. Although I am vegan, Joann still eats meat, but she treats it as a condiment and she does not have it at every meal. Look for the organic, pasture-raised meat and eggs to be on sale beforehand to get the best price.

17. Reduce Restaurants

How does eating out less save money on groceries? Okay, this one actually saves money on your overall food budget, while also helping you to make healthier choices by eating those prepared meals at home. Restaurants serve huge portions and rarely provide organic ingredients. Most of their menu options are very unhealthy. When you do go out to eat, choose the healthiest option and go ahead and put half in a to-go box to avoid overeating. Staying home is still the best option, especially if you have followed our other tips to have healthy meals and snacks available.

18. Drink More Water (Omit Sodas)


Drinking lots of filtered water and completely omitting sodas will save you lots of money at the grocery store and even at restaurants. The health benefits of this one tip will pay immediate dividends! Yes, you may have detoxification symptoms from getting rid of the sugar and caffeine, but your energy level and weight loss will be well worth it. Plus, you'll have more money to buy healthier food.

I recommend drinking about half an ounce of water per pound of weight. For instance, I weigh about 175 pounds, so I need to drink 88 ounces per day, which is 11 cups. Of course, higher activity, especially outside on a warm day, would cause more thirst and increase this need.

19. Eat Fruit First for Dessert

What? Eat fruit first for dessert?! I don't get it! Okay, this tip has got to be my favorite. Fruit gets such a bad reputation for its natural sugar, but it is highly nutritious and the fiber contained in the fruit helps to prevent blood-sugar spikes. Raw fruit is delicious and is sweet enough to be considered dessert for most people, satisfying that sweet tooth in a healthy way. I recommend eating it first for two reasons.

First, fruit is mostly water and digests very quickly. If you eat it after a heavy meal, it will sit on top of that meal and ferment, causing gas and bloating. Eat it first and wait at least five minutes to give it a chance to move on out of the stomach, kind of like an appetizer.



Second, it may ruin your appetite. That's a good thing! Eat your dessert first ... as long as it's raw fruit! Your tummy will become satisfied quicker and you may eat less of any cooked food or meat on the plate, which gives you more leftovers and saves you money. It's also a great way to increase your raw food intake!

20. Grow Some of Your Own Food

There are many ways to grow your own food, whether it's inside or outside. Indoors, it is easy to sprout seeds without even using soil. Sprouted seeds are packed with protein and super nutrients. You can also grow microgreens in a small amount of soil and harvest them when they have just a few leaves. Microgreens are also more nutrient dense than full-grown greens. Some people with restricted space grow food in hanging baskets.

Outdoors, it takes quite a bit more work. Raised-bed gardening is very popular, but just using a small patch of ground works, too. Organic and/or heirloom seeds or plants are the best way to go to avoid GMOs and pesticides. Buying the organic soil and other supplies will cost more up front, but the long-term savings will pay off. This also guarantees freshness and optimum ripeness.

Also, you can make your own nut milk. If you can find the nuts on a good sale, this can save money compared to buying the nut milks in a carton. Plus, you can avoid any of the fillers, sweeteners, and gums that often come in the carton.

Conclusion

I hope these tips will help you to buy healthy groceries on a budget. It is a challenge well worth accepting, both for your pocket book and your health. Make it a game and have fun with it. If possible, increase your grocery budget over time to accommodate more organic food. It will cost you less in the long run, when you rarely have to visit your doctor, or better yet, the hospital.

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