

Getting More for Your Money

With careful meal planning and smart shopping, you can make the most out of your family's budget by always including fruits and vegetables in your meals. Check out these tips and get the most for your money when you buy fruits and vegetables!

Plan your meals to fit your budget.

- Make a list — Stick to your list to avoid spending money on unnecessary items.
- Have staples on hand — Make sure you have staples that you use on a regular basis such as dried herbs and spices, olive oil and flour.
- Include all forms of fruits and vegetables — In addition to fresh, include frozen, canned and dried forms on your list.
- Plan meals around fruits and vegetables that go a long way — Choose ones that you can eat a couple of times during the week.

Compare unit prices to find the best dollar value.

Unit price = package price divided by number of units (ounces or items)

Look for unit prices on the shelf in front of the product, above the product or to the side of the product. If unit pricing is not posted, take a calculator to the store (or use the one on your cell phone) to figure out the unit prices.

Use unit pricing to compare:

- Package sizes — bigger is not always cheaper
- Brands — generic or store brands are often, but not always, lower in price
- Product forms (fresh, frozen and canned items) or individual items, such as apples or rolls

Compare the "Nutrition Facts" labels to find the best nutritional value.

Compare the gram amounts of fiber, sugar or protein, for example. Or compare the % Daily Value amounts— a value of 20 percent or more is considered high; a value of 5 percent or less is considered low.



Spend Smart:

Consider all forms of fruits and vegetables. Fresh, frozen, canned and dried have similar nutrient values. Try these tips for finding smart buys.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- Purchase in season for best price and quality. Consider freezing extra if time and space allow.
- Choose the smaller size when buying apples, oranges, bananas and other individual fruits that are sold by the pound. The smaller size fruits are closer to the 1-cup serving size, which helps with portion control.
- Pre-cut fruit and vegetables cost more. They're at least 3 times more expensive and spoil faster.

Frozen Fruits and Vegetables

- Commercially frozen products are frozen within hours of picking and tend to retain more flavor. They also have less sugar and sodium than canned.
- Buy plain frozen fruits and vegetables instead of those with syrup, special sauces or seasonings. Syrups, sauces or seasonings can add calories, fat and sodium, as well as cost.

Canned Fruits and Vegetables

- Choose juice- or water-packed varieties.
- Watch for sale prices and stock up.
- Use coupons and/or select the generic brand.
- Use unit pricing; individual-size containers can cost twice as much.
- Drain and rinse canned vegetables to reduce the sodium.

Dried Fruit

- Monitor portion size; ½ cup of dried fruit is equivalent to 1 cup of fresh.
- Make your own snack packs by measuring ½-cup amounts into plastic bags or small containers.

Content adapted from the "Spend Smart. Eat Smart." Web site, which is sponsored by the Iowa State University Extension. Visit www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings.

