

# Prevention C+olumn

HEALTHY EATING – SEPTEMBER 2021

## Enticing, tasty, affordable... and nutritious!

Can you have a healthy diet and not go bankrupt?  
For sure! You just need to keep in mind some guidelines  
when grocery shopping and handling food at home.

Our food dollars are worth less.  
According to the annual [Canada's Food Price Report](#) released jointly by Dalhousie University and the University of Guelph, the average Canadian family spent \$12,667 on food in 2020, an increase of \$487 over the previous year.

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# Highly nutritional and very affordable

Eating a healthy diet without going bankrupt is possible, but you'll need to roll up your sleeves and put your apron on. Cooking is a must if you want to maximize savings. Fortunately, there is a wide range of highly nutritious, affordable foods you can work with. These foods are readily available, which means they can be consumed at any time and in sufficient quantities to make the most of their nutritional benefits. Our foods, for the most part local and seasonal, can be prepared and combined as the basis for delicious comfort meals that save you money and are...democratic.

These numerous foods include:

- Eggs
- Milk and enriched, plant-based beverages (soy, oat)
- Peanut butter
- Fresh fruit such as apples, oranges and bananas and frozen fruit
- Many fresh vegetables such as cabbage, beets, onions, turnip, potatoes, lettuce, corn, canned tomatoes and other canned and frozen vegetables
- Fresh and frozen fish, canned tuna and other fish
- Turkey, whole poultry and certain cuts of meat
- All legumes: lentils, chick peas, kidney beans...
- All forms of tofu and soy
- Grain products such as oats, rice, pasta, barley, bread and whole grain cereals ■



## GROCERY SHOPPING Tips for coming out on top

The dietitian Suzanne Lepage is a food security expert for pregnant women at The Montreal Diet Dispensary. She has good suggestions for reducing your grocery bill but eating well:

- Study the flyers, because every week there is a **big special on vegetables**.
- Shop for food at several stores, if you can, and don't forget the **small ethnic grocery stores** (Asian, Middle-Eastern, Portuguese, Caribbean, Mexican, etc.) that often have excellent specials.
- Stock up on **frozen fruits and vegetables**. For instance, 1 kg of frozen broccoli (zero waste) compared to 2-3 stalks of fresh broccoli (approximately 30% waste).
- Select **bulk food** for preparing at home, since processing increases the cost of food (e.g. boneless chicken, fruit and vegetable platters, cubed cheese).
- Replace meat with **less expensive proteins** such as legumes, eggs, tofu and canned fish. You can find all sorts of recipe ideas on the internet.
- Make easy **homemade desserts** with eggs, milk, fresh or canned fruit. They're less expensive and more nutritious than commercial desserts. ■

## Beware of food advertising

Companies depend a lot on advertising and marketing their products in order to attract consumers' attention. That is why you need to be vigilant as you wander up and down the grocery aisles. Even though their claims must comply with rules issued by Health Canada, phrases such as *low fat*, *made from real vegetables*, *organic* or even *source of 8 essential nutrients* (when the first ingredient of this cereal is sugar!) can distract consumers. It's best to read the list of ingredients.

Another example is "superfoods." Adding the prefix "super" to packaging often gives you the impression that the contents are better for your health and have extraordinary virtues and powers. Asian goji berries, Brazilian acai juice, maca root, spirulina powder, raw cacao, organic coconut oil and macadamia milk are exotic products billed as being miraculous, which cost a lot and have been transported a long way to our stores. However, many products that we ordinarily eat contain nutrients that are just as beneficial for our health as those in so-called "superfoods," a term that is not regulated in Canada. ■



## Prevent food waste

Who hasn't had to throw out food due to excess buying, bad storage, bad management or being forgotten in the fridge or cupboard? Almost two thirds (63%)<sup>1</sup> of food that ends up in the garbage or compost could have been consumed. This represents 140 kg of food per household every year and a loss of \$1,100. Studies show that fruit, vegetables, bread and cereals are the groups of food that are most wasted in Canadian households and that most of these losses are avoidable. But many people are not aware of how to reduce preventable waste in their kitchens.<sup>2</sup>

### THERE ARE A THOUSAND EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PREVENT FOOD WASTE. HERE ARE SEVEN:

1. Regardless of how you organize your refrigerator, place **the most perishable** items where you won't lose track of them, and eat them first.
2. Place **fruit and vegetables** in separate containers. The reason is simple: fruits such as apples and pears produce ethylene, an odourless gas, that damages vegetables that are sensitive to it, such as cucumbers and carrots, which will spoil or become bitter.
3. Cut off **greens and leaves** from radish, turnips, carrots and beets and store them in the refrigerator separately to add to soups, pesto and salads.
4. Put your **meats and poultry** on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator or a separate drawer to avoid contaminating other food in the event of leaks.
5. Store your **leftovers** in **transparent containers** to keep them in sight. How many delicious meals end up at the back of the fridge?
6. Some foods in **your cupboards** would be better off in the fridge to prevent them from oxidizing and tasting rancid (a bit like floor varnish!) such as shelled nuts, grains, flax or cold pressed walnut oil, brown rice and whole wheat flour. You don't have a lot of space? Buy smaller quantities, especially if you don't cook with them often.
7. Is it **still good**? Before throwing out food, see this [reference](#) on refrigerator and freezer storage times. You'll find good advice on purchasing and handling food for limiting spoilage. ■

## Other solutions for saving money

1. Plan purchases for several days at a time in order to have fresh food without waste.
2. Before buying, look at what you have on hand and make a list of what you need on paper or on your phone.
3. Avoid going grocery shopping when you're hungry, otherwise it'll cost you!
4. Consider buying house brands offered by chains: they're often cheaper.
5. Buy in bulk! Food sold by weight allows you to buy the quantity that you need.
6. Many grocery stores offer low-cost or free delivery service, depending on the time of day. Look into this as it might be worth it to stock up on heavy or large items such as bottles, cans, pasta, flour, toilet paper...
7. Beware of economy sizes. Even if the price is right, the extra amount often ends up in the garbage can since we get tired of it or it spoils. Also keep in mind how much storage space you have.
8. When you get back home, set aside time to prepare bigger fruit such as melons and pineapple and vegetables such as cauliflower, celery and carrots for easy eating.
9. Don't have any good menu ideas? Make a list or take photos of your favourite dishes and save them in your phone. ■

## Take-aways

Since food is a big ticket item of any household's budget, it's important to prioritize healthy, nutritious foods, avoid waste and do more cooking at home. This way, this essential expense can be transformed into an investment in our health and well-being. ■

1. RECYC-QUÉBEC, [Gaspiilage alimentaire](#) (Food waste, in French only), [Online], 2021. (Page consulted July 13, 2021).

2. CANADIAN GOVERNMENT, [Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada](#), [Online], 2021; LES AMIES DE LA TERRE DE QUÉBEC, [How to avoid food waste](#), [PDF].