



Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

Plant-based diets are often perceived as being more expensive, but this is not necessarily true. Contrary to popular belief, plant-based meals don't have to drain your wallet. In this post, we'll talk about how to ditch the expensive junk in favor of affordable plant-based meals that will suit every budget.

Please note: if your family is having a hard time making ends meet - if you're experiencing food insecurity - please consider reaching out to your family doctor. They may be able to help you schedule an appointment at your local food bank or WIC office, or may be able to connect you with other resources in your community. Please don't be afraid to speak up if you're struggling. You can also visit the [Eat Your Greens resources page](#) for links to programs that can help with food access and costs.

According to a [recent publication](#), a low-fat vegan diet may be as much as 16% less expensive than a diet that includes meat and dairy, cutting \$500 or more from your yearly grocery budget. Processed foods, which are full of preservatives and unhealthy additives, often come with a hefty price tag. Adopting a plant-based diet offers numerous benefits both for your health and the environment. So, let's get into how to create affordable plant-based meals that are both nutritious and budget-friendly.

If you're on a tight budget, it is important to avoid eating out whenever possible. Nothing makes your waistline grow and your wallet shrink faster than restaurant meals!

Budget-Friendly Grocery Shopping Tips

The number one strategy for healthy eating while juggling a busy schedule is advanced planning -- and sticking to a budget is no different!

- Creating a meal plan is key to reducing food waste and saving money. Start by outlining your meals for the week. Know what's in your fridge and pantry and plan meals around what you already have. Find recipes that use similar ingredients to maximize their potential and minimize waste.
- When grocery shopping, stick to your list and avoid impulse purchases. I have found that using my local supermarket's online ordering app and taking advantage of curbside grocery pick up helps a lot. Most major grocery chains now offer this time and money saving service for free. Even if there is a small fee, I have found that the additional cost is less than what I tend to spend on impulse buys.

Protein & Produce

Often, the most expensive items in the grocery cart are the protein-containing foods. Protein is an essential component of any balanced diet. Fortunately, there are plenty of budget-friendly plant-based protein sources available. Opt for beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, and affordable whole grains like quinoa and brown rice. Buying dried beans and lentils instead of canned varieties can also save money in the long run. At the time



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of writing this, the price for lean ground beef at our local grocery store ranged from about \$5 per pound to as much as \$9 per pound; chicken averaged \$5 per pound, and salmon was a whopping \$17 to \$20 per pound. Compare that to the one-pound bag of dried pinto beans which was only \$1.20.

The next most expensive food category is fresh produce. The produce section can be overwhelming, but with a little know-how, it can be a budget-friendly paradise. Look for fruits and vegetables that are in season, as they tend to be more affordable and fresher. Consider buying staple vegetables in bulk when they are on sale and freezing for later use. I always keep frozen jalapenos, bell peppers, and pre-chopped onions on hand for quick use when cooking dinner. Freeze uneaten fruit before it goes bad and use in smoothies or “nice cream”. Don't forget to check out the discounted produce section, as slightly bruised or misshapen items can still be used in cooking. Frozen or canned vegetables are often less expensive than fresh options and you don't risk throwing out tons of wilted produce that didn't get eaten. They may also have more nutrients than their fresh counterparts because they were picked and packaged at the peak of ripeness compared to fresh produce which is often picked before it's ready to prevent spoiling during shipping. A word of caution: watch out for added salt and sugar if you go with canned or frozen options.

Smart shopping strategies to save money

When shopping on a budget, it's essential to be mindful of pricing and seek out the best deals. Compare prices between different brands and stores to ensure you're getting the most bang for your buck. Take advantage of coupons, loyalty programs, and discounts. Here in Texas, HEB has coupons for both in-store and online shopping. Buying in bulk can also save money in the long run, especially for non-perishable items like grains and legumes.

Easy and Inexpensive Plant-Based Meal Ideas

Let's start with breakfast.

Oatmeal is a versatile and affordable breakfast option that can be customized to suit your taste preferences. It is also super quick to prepare when you're rushing to get the kids out the door to school. Go plain rolled oats: these are more cost-effective than instant or flavored varieties, which also come with tons of added sugar. Add toppings like fresh fruits, nuts, seeds, and a drizzle of maple syrup or peanut butter for added flavor and nutrition.

Another fun thing to make with oats is homemade granola.

Granola can be expensive and full of added fat when store-bought, but making it at home is surprisingly easy and affordable. Combine rolled oats with nuts, seeds, dried fruits, and a sweetener like maple syrup or honey. Bake until golden and crisp. Enjoy your homemade granola as a cereal with plant-based milk, or use it as a topping for yogurt and desserts.



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For a substantial and satisfying lunch, I like to make Buddha bowls which generally include various grains, legumes, and vegetables. First, prepare a batch of affordable grains like quinoa or brown rice. Add protein sources such as chickpeas, black beans, tofu, or edamame. Last, top your Buddha bowl with an assortment of affordable roasted or sautéed vegetables. I especially like roasted sweet potatoes, matchstick carrots, corn, and cherry tomatoes. My favorite dressing is a simple cilantro-lime vinaigrette.

Wraps and sandwiches are convenient and portable lunch options. Choose whole-grain tortillas or bread for added nutritional value. Fill your wraps or sandwiches with plant-based protein sources like hummus, fat-free refried beans, or tempeh. Don't forget to add a variety of fresh vegetables, such as lettuce, sprouts, tomatoes, and cucumbers, for added crunch and flavor. Of course, the cheapest thing you can have for lunch is the leftovers from last night's dinner!

When it comes to dinner, my go to is a one-pot wonder like plant-based stews and stir-fries. One-pot meals are not only convenient but also cost-effective. Choose inexpensive ingredients like lentils, beans, and seasonal vegetables. Cook them in a flavorful vegetable broth or tomato-based sauce for a hearty and nutritious stew or soup. Don't be afraid to experiment with herbs and spices to enhance the taste without adding cost. As an added bonus, with one pot meals there are fewer dishes to wash up later!

Contrary to popular belief, a plant-based diet doesn't have to be more expensive than the standard American diet, and it's a whole lot healthier. We didn't even touch on the savings associated with lower medical bills that can come with a whole food plant-based diet! I hope I've inspired you to make your grocery list and put your newfound money-saving superpowers to good use.

Thanks for visiting, and don't forget to eat your greens!