

Buying Food for Thrifty Small Families



Bulletin #4332

Once you have planned your menus and made a shopping list, you're ready to buy the food. The prices you pay will depend on where and how you shop. It takes time and effort to become a food buying expert. But it's well worth it. To make your food dollars count:

- Decide where to shop.
- Compare while you shop.
- Keep your shopping skills sharp.

Buying tips when shopping for bread, cereal, rice, and pasta:

- Choose whole-grain or enriched products for good nutrition.
- Buy cereals in large boxes instead of small, individual packages.
- Look for bargains on day-old bread and bakery products.
- Add your own seasonings and sauces to rice and pasta.
- Buy cereals plain, without added sugar. Add your own sugar if you don't need to worry about weight.
- Buy regular-type rice and regular- or quick-type oats, and cereal. The instant types cost over twice as much per serving.

Other fact sheets in this series include:

- Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families, Bulletin #4330
- Ideas for Planning Thrifty Menus, Bulletin #4331
- Thrifty Recipes: Main Dishes, Bulletin #4333
- Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts, Bulletin #4334

Buying tips when shopping for milk, cheese and yogurt:

- Select the largest container you can use without waste. Larger containers are usually less expensive.
- Grate cheese yourself. Packages of shredded cheese cost more than the same amount of cheese in wedges or blocks.

Buying tips when shopping for vegetables and fruits:

- Watch for good buys on fresh fruits and vegetables in season.
- Buy plain canned or plain frozen vegetables instead of those with added seasonings and sauces or boil-in-the-bag packages.
- Look for large bags of frozen vegetables. They may be bargains, and you can pour out the exact amount you need.

Buying tips when shopping for meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dry beans and nuts:

- Look for specials at the meat counter. Buying sale cuts can mean big savings for you. Some higher-priced meats may fit your budget when they are on sale.
- Cut up meats and chicken yourself. For example, stew meat usually costs more than a chuck roast. You can cut the roast into cubes and save money. Chicken parts often cost more than whole chickens, too.
- For convenience, buy larger containers of prepared frozen foods such as meatballs and chicken breasts. Use only what you need, and keep the remainder frozen until you need them.



These foods cost more and some will increase the fat, sugar and salt in your diet, too:

- Frozen vegetables with seasonings and sauces
- Out-of-season fresh fruits and vegetables
- Ready-made or ready-to-bake cookies, cakes, pies and buns
- Sugar-coated cereals
- Cream, ice cream, cream cheese, yogurt and specialty cheeses
- Many ready-to-eat dishes
- Some cuts of meats, poultry and fish
- Snack foods, such as potato, corn or cheese chips or puffs
- Soft drinks
- Candy

Compare the Cost of a Meal or a Serving

Some foods have parts you can't eat—like the bone and fat in meat or the cores, pits or peels of fresh fruits and vegetables. For these foods, the lowest price per pound isn't always the best buy. To find the best buy, you need to compare the costs of the amounts you need for a meal or for a serving.

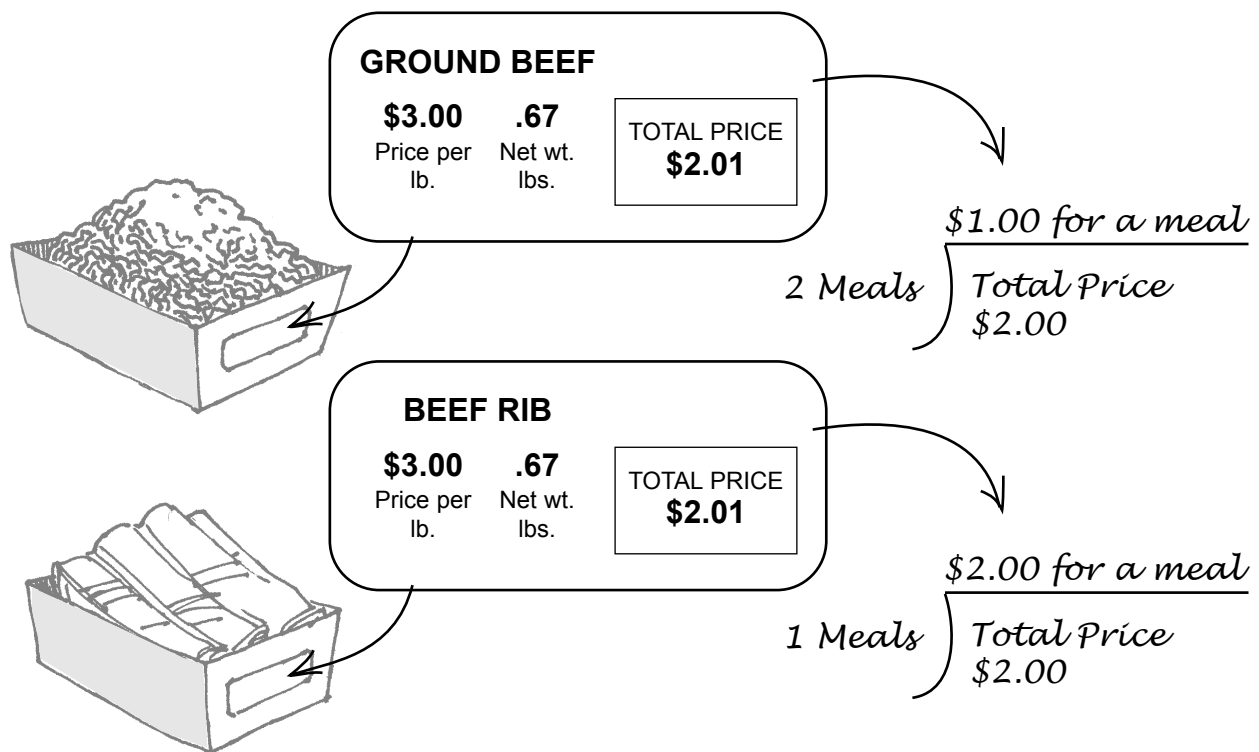
From past experience, you probably know how much of these foods you need for a meal. To find the cost of a meal:

- First, think of how many meals a package will serve.
- Then divide the number of meals you expect to get into the price for the package. This gives you the cost per meal.

The example below shows how to compare costs for meats.

At the meat counter:

Compare the cost of a *meal*. Which is the better buy?



For some foods—especially fruits—it may be easier to compare the cost of a serving than the cost of a meal. To find the cost of a serving:

- First think of the number of servings you can get from a market unit—such as a pound of bananas, five grapefruit or one pineapple.
- Then divide the number of servings into the price for the market unit to find the cost of a serving.

The example below shows how to compare costs for fresh fruits.

Read Food Labels

Food labels can tell you a lot about what's inside the package. To see what you are really paying for, read the label.

- Look for the list of ingredients. Ingredients are listed on the package in order from largest to smallest amounts.



INGREDIENTS: GRAPE JUICE, GRAPE JUICE FROM CONCENTRATE, ASCORBIC ACID (VITAMIN C), NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS OR COLORS ADDED.

The ingredients on this label tell you that this is all juice.

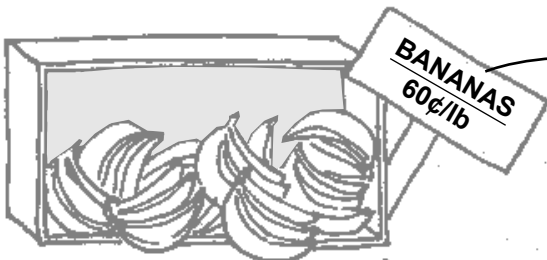
The ingredients on this label tell you that there's no juice at all. It's mostly sugar.



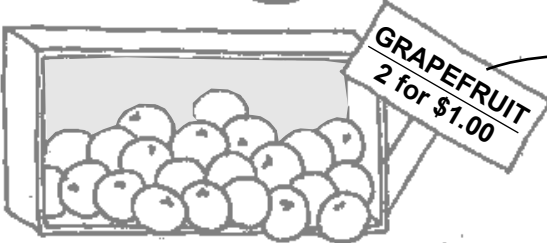
INGREDIENTS: SUGAR, DEXTROSE, CITRIC ACID (PROVIDES TARTNESS), NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS, SODIUM CITRATE (REGULATES TARTNESS), DEXTRIN, TRICALCIUM PHOSPHATE (PREVENTS CAKING), VITAMIN C, CELLULOSE GUM (ADDS BODY), HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE OIL, ARTIFICIAL COLOR.

In the produce section:

Compare the cost for a *serving*. Which of the following three is the better buy?



If 1 pound of bananas gives you about 3 servings, then 60¢ for a pound divided by 3 servings = 20¢ for a serving.



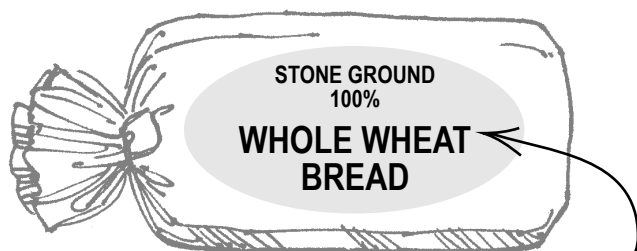
If 2 grapefruits cut in half give you 4 servings, then \$1.00 for 2 divided by 4 servings = 25¢ for a serving.



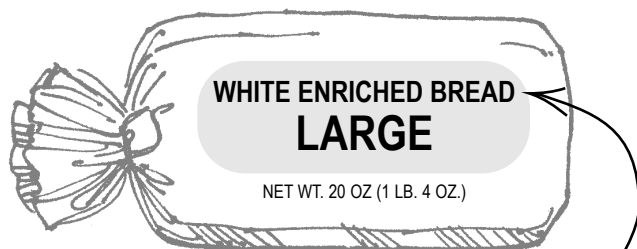
If 1 pineapple cut up gives you about 6 servings, then \$2.50 each divided by 6 servings = 42¢ for a serving.

Bananas at 1 pound for 60¢ and grapefruits at 2 for \$1.00 are the better buys.

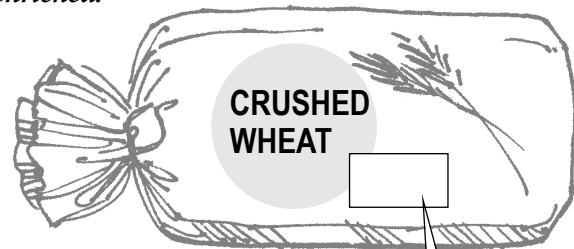
- Look to see if breads, bakery products, rice, flour and pasta are whole-grain or enriched. "Whole-grain" flour still has most of the nutrients that were originally in the wheat or other grain. In making white flour, however, some of those nutrients are lost. "Enriched" means that those nutrients have been put back. Sometimes, you can tell if a food is whole-grain from its name. For other foods, you'll need to look at the ingredient list.



This label tells you in the name that the flour is all whole-grain.



This label tells you in the name that the bread is enriched.



This label tells you in the list of ingredients that this bread is made with enriched flour.

INGREDIENTS: UNBLEACHED, ENRICHED FLOUR, MALTED BARLEY FLOUR, IRON (FERROUS SULFATE), NIACIN, THIAMINE (THIAMINE MONONITRATE OR THIAMINE HYDROCHLORIDE), RIBOFLAVIN, WATER, CRUSHED WHEAT, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, VEGETABLE SHORTENING (PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL AND/OR PALM OIL). CONTAINS 2 PERCENT OR LESS OF EACH OF THE FOLLOWING: BRAN, YEAST, SALT, CALCIUM SULFATE, DOUGH CONDITIONERS (MAY CONTAIN ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING: SODIUM STEARCYLLACTYLATE, ETHOXYLATED MONO- AND DI-GLYCERIDES, MONOCALCIUM PHOSPHATE, CALCIUM CARBONATE, POTASSIUM BROMATE), MONO- AND DI-GLYCERIDES, YEAST NUTRIENTS (DIAMMONIUM PHOSPHATE AND/OR AMMONIUM CHLORIDE OR AMMONIUM SULFATE), CALCIUM PROPIONATE (ADDED TO RETARD SPOilage)

Look at Nutrition Labeling

Serving size is more nearly the same for similar products.

Calories per serving includes the number of these calories from fat.

Percent (%) Daily Value shows how a food fits into a 2,000-calorie diet.

The daily values at the bottom of some labels show the amounts of certain nutrients needed by people with diets of 2,000 and 2,500 calories.

Calories per gram tell the number of calories in a gram of fat, carbohydrate

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 meal (311g)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving

Calories 300Calories from Fat 70

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 8g	12%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Cholesterol 25mg	8%
Sodium 560 mg	23%
Total Carbohydrate 28g	9%
Dietary Fiber 7g	28%
Sugars 8g	

Protein 29g

Vitamin A 35% • Vitamin C 25%
Calcium 65% • Iron 15%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g	
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g	
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg	
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg	
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g	
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g	

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Cheese lasagna label

and protein.

Keep Your Shopping Skills Sharp

Be alert to the ways foods are displayed. Watch out for foods placed at the end of the aisle or in an attractive display. They may not really be bargains. Be careful using "cents-off" coupons, too. Often these coupons are for name brand products that cost more than the store brand products, even with the coupon discount. Be sure to compare costs!

Prepared by Nellie Hedstrom, Extension nutrition specialist
Source: "Thrifty Meals for Two: Making Food Dollars Count," USDA Home and Garden Bulletin #244.

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