

Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families

Bulletin #4330



There are ways to provide nutritious meals for two while keeping food costs down. We planned two weeks of menus to start you off. Recipes for many of the dishes are found in the "Thrifty Recipes for Small Families" fact sheet series. These menus are easy on the budget and are planned to provide the protein, vitamins and minerals that adults 50 years of age and older need. Fat, sugar and salt are limited. If you use food stamps, the menu ideas can help you use them wisely.

The menus included in this fact sheet are for people who are healthy. Good eating can help keep you healthy and even improve your health. However, these menus may not be right for people who need special diets because of diseases.

The sample meals show how to plan nutritious, low-cost meals. But only you can plan menus that are exactly right for you. Your menus should fit your food likes and dislikes, and match your own eating pattern. The menus should also provide for special diet needs you have. Your own menus can include your favorite recipes, and they can match your time, energy and interest in cooking.

Other fact sheets in this series include:

- Ideas for Planning Thrifty Menus, Bulletin #4331
- Buying Food for Thrifty Small Families, Bulletin #4332
- Thrifty Recipes: Main Dishes, Bulletin #4333
- Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts, Bulletin #4334

Start with Menu Planning

Planning menus is the first step to good eating on a budget. There are some big advantages to making a plan:

- **A plan can help you take advantage of special sales.** Check your newspaper for special sales that fit your budget. Meat can take a big bite out of your food dollar. Watch for special sales on meat, poultry and fish, and plan your meals around them.
- **A plan can help you cut down on impulse buying at the store.** Those impulse buys often aren't tops in nutrition. Chances are some foods, like pastries, sweets, candy and snack chips are high in price and calories and low in nutrients. Impulse buys may be expensive non-food items, too. Either way, they can really add to your grocery bill.
- **A plan can help you avoid waste.** It lets you know the right kind of food and package size to buy to fit your needs.
- **A plan can help you save time.** You won't have to go back to the store to buy foods you forgot if you shop with a list. Save your time for things you enjoy more.

Plan Your Own Economy Meals

You have seen the economy ideas used in the sample meal plans. You know the advantages of planning. But how can you put it all together into nutritious meals?

- Choose a variety of foods.
- Make meals healthy, avoid too much fat, sugar and salt.

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- Use time-saving steps.
- Use a menu planning checklist.

For variety, the meal pattern below can serve as a guide. But other patterns are okay, too. A meal pattern helps you get the vitamins and minerals you need.

Choose a Variety of Food

Breads, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group:

Whole-grain and enriched breads, cereals, rice, and pasta are important sources of B vitamins, which help you make energy from the foods you eat. Iron and protein are important nutrients found in this food group. The fiber you get from whole grains prevents constipation and may help prevent cancer.

To stretch your food dollar, you can use grain products as side dishes, and you can

combine them with small servings of meat, poultry or fish in main dishes. Choose the lowfat items in this group. Limit the amount of high-fat pastries and sweets. For older adults, six servings are recommended from this group a day. (A serving is one small roll, slice of bread, 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal, or 1/2 cup cooked rice or pasta.)

Vegetable Group:

Dark green and deep yellow vegetables are especially high in nutrients and are good choices. The high levels of vitamin C and vitamin A in vegetables help your body stay healthy. These nutrients also function as antioxidants to help ward off major chronic diseases, such as cancer and heart disease. All vegetables are important to your diet and will provide nutrients, including fiber, for health. Fresh is usually best. But if not in season, frozen or canned vegetables can be good buys. Some canned vegetables contain high amounts of sodium. Check nutrition labeling to

Sample Meal Pattern	Example from the Sample Menus	Your Own Menus
MORNING		
Fruit or juice	<i>Grapefruit juice</i>	_____
Cereal with milk, or egg	<i>Scrambled egg</i>	_____
Bread	<i>on toasted roll</i>	_____
NOON		
Main dish	<i>Tomato, bacon, lettuce sandwich</i>	_____
Vegetable or fruit	<i>Split pea soup</i>	_____
Bread	<i>(in sandwich)</i>	_____
EVENING		
Main dish	<i>Braised beef on noodles</i>	_____
Vegetable	<i>Chopped broccoli</i>	_____
Vegetable or salad	<i>Apple wedges</i>	_____
Cereal or bread product	<i>Noodles</i>	_____
Dessert, if desired	<i>Quick bread</i>	_____
SNACK		
Cereal or bread product	<i>Ready-to-eat cereal</i>	_____
Beverage	<i>Milk</i>	_____

make the best choices. For older adults, it is recommended that three servings of vegetables be eaten daily. Eat 1/2 cup cooked or chopped raw vegetables or 1 cup of leafy greens to make a serving.

Fruit Group:

A variety of fruits are high in antioxidants, vitamin A and vitamin C. The brighter in color, the higher level of antioxidant the fruit contains. Maine's native blueberries are well known for their high antioxidant content. Vitamin A is needed for healthy skin and vitamin C keeps gums and tissue healthy. Buy fruits in season to get the best buys without added sugar, fat or salt. It is recommended that older adults have at least two servings a day. A serving is one piece of fruit or melon wedge, 3/4 cup of juice or 1/2 cup of canned fruit. Only 1/4-cup dried fruit is a serving.

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nuts Group:

Foods included in this group are meats, poultry, fish, dry beans, dry peas, soybeans, lentils, eggs, nuts and peanut butter. These foods not only provide protein, but are also sources of vitamins and minerals. Iron is an important nutrient found in this food group.

The less expensive sources of this group are usually the plant foods, such as beans, peas and nuts. Eggs have very good quality protein and are usually low in cost. Include two servings daily to have an adequate diet. A serving of meat, poultry, or fish is 2 1/2 to 3 ounces. Count 1/2-cup cooked dry beans or peas as a serving. One egg is the same as one ounce of meat, as is 2 tablespoons of peanut butter.

Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group:

Foods in this group are considered the best natural sources of the nutrient calcium. Foods in other food groups are fortified with extra

Fats, Oils, & Sweets:
USE SPARINGLY

Food Guide Pyramid **A Guide to Daily Food Choices**

- Fat (naturally occurring and added)
- ▼ Sugars (added)

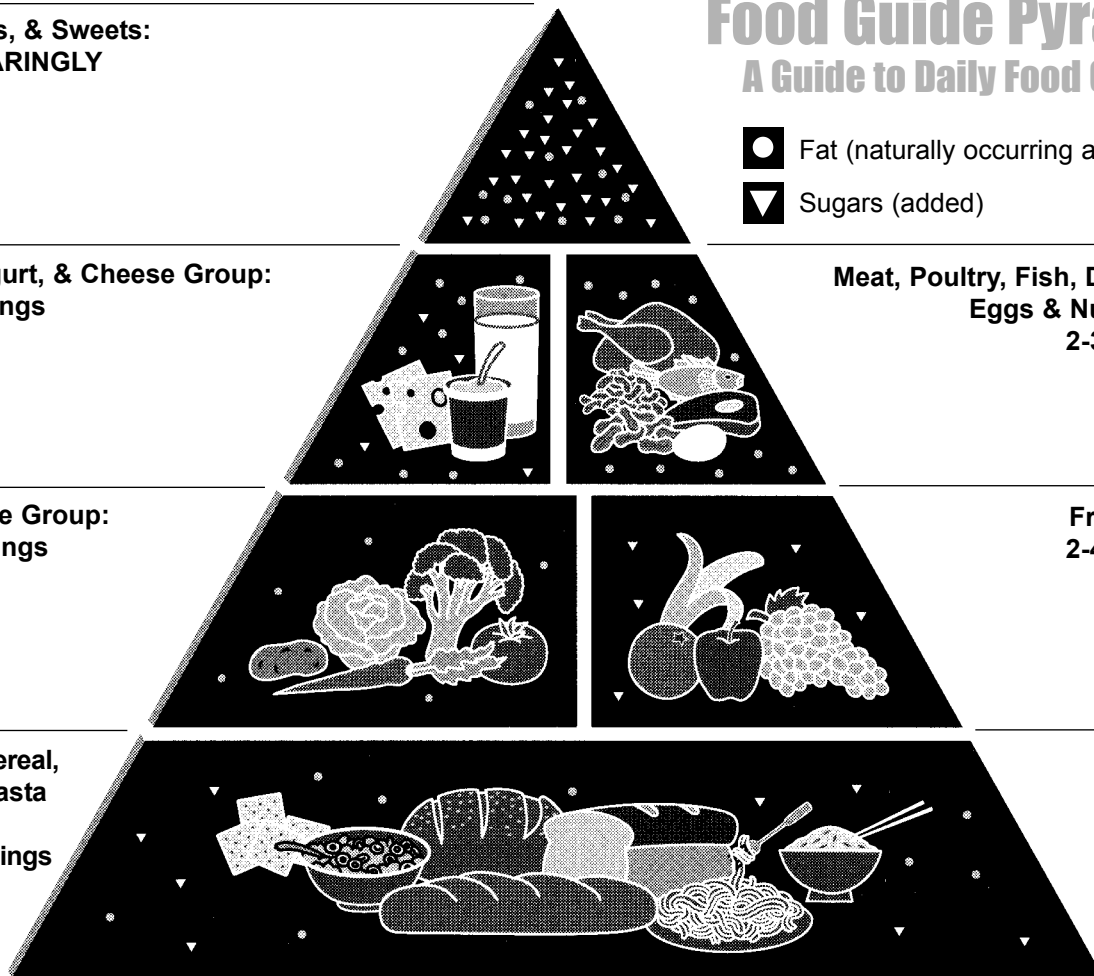
Milk, Yogurt, & Cheese Group:
2-3 Servings

**Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans,
Eggs & Nuts Group:**
2-3 Servings

Vegetable Group:
3-5 Servings

Fruit Group:
2-4 Servings

**Bread, Cereal,
Rice & Pasta
Group:**
6-11 Servings



calcium to make them good sources as well. Check labels on cereals and juices to choose those with high amounts of calcium. Calcium is needed to keep bones and teeth healthy. Many older people get less calcium than they need.

To make your food dollars count choose for the less expensive forms of milk, yogurt and cheese. The healthier versions are the low or nonfat types. Drink fat-free milk at meals, put it on cereal and use in cooking. Some products, such as ice milk, may have little fat but will add calories to your diet because of the sugar that they contain. Enjoy these foods, but in smaller portions.

The recommended intake for calcium has recently been increased for those over 50 years of age. To get the calcium you need to eat at least 2-3 servings from this group and increase calcium intake from other sources as well. A serving is 1 cup of milk or yogurt, or 1 1/2 to 2 ounces of cheese.

Avoid Too Much Fat, Sugar and Salt

Fats, Oils and Sweets Group:

To make meals healthy, avoid too much fat, sugar, and salt.

Fat in the diet comes from two sources:

- Fats are found naturally in some foods, like whole milk, cheese, nuts, seeds, meats, poultry, fish and chocolate.
- Fats are added to your diet when you use butter, margarine, lard, drippings, mayonnaise, salad dressing, shortening, and gravy.

To cut down on the level of fat in your diet:

- Choose low-fat foods more often.
- Fix foods the low-fat way. Trim fat from meats. Remove skin from poultry. Bake, boil or broil instead of frying. Season vegetables with herbs and spices instead of butter and margarine.
- Go easy on fats added at the table. Limit the amount of butter, margarine or salad dressing you use.

Sugar has many names: syrup, molasses and honey are some of them. Candy, jam, jelly and many soft drinks are mostly sugar, too. Sugars are high in calories and low in nutrients. Try limiting them in your menu plan.

Much of the **salt** in our diets is added to foods in cooking and at the table. Try using less

table salt and eating less salty foods. Many of these foods have salt in them:

- Canned and instant soups
- Processed food such as prepared meals and rice or noodle mixes
- Seasoning mixes
- Sauces such as barbecue and soy sauce
- Snack foods such as salted chips and pretzels

Use Time-Saving Steps

Not everyone loves to cook. Even those who enjoy cooking do not always have the time or the energy. Buying convenience foods or eating out can be costly. But there are ways to eat well at low cost without spending hours in the kitchen. Again, planning ahead will help you. Consider these ideas:

- **Use the lower cost convenience foods.** Examples of some that are usually good buys are frozen orange juice concentrate, canned and frozen vegetables without seasonings, individually frozen meatballs or chicken breasts, sauces and cake mixes.
- **Plan some meals so you will have leftovers to use for later meals and snacks.** Look at the "planned-over" ideas from the sample menus for examples.
- **Do most of your cooking for the week on one or two days and freeze or store some of the food.** Then enjoy being able to just heat and eat for the rest of the week.
- **Try homemade mixes to save time.**

Use a Menu Planning Checklist

To make sure you are off to a good start, review the menu-planning checklist below.

Do your menus

- ✓ Include leftovers?
- ✓ Use store specials?
- ✓ Have a variety of foods?
- ✓ Emphasize grain products?
- ✓ Rely on economical foods?

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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Thrifty Menus for Small Families: Week 1

Amounts to serve *two people* are shown in parentheses after most of the foods on the menu. The recipes for foods in bold print are included in other fact sheets in the “Thrifty Recipes for Small Families” series. Serving sizes are shown on the recipes.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
BREAKFAST						
Orange (1) Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Toast (3 slices) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Grapefruit juice (1 c.) Eggs (2) Toast (4 slices)	Banana (1) Oatmeal (1 c. dry) Toasted biscuits (3) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Grapefruit juice (1 c.) Cooked cereal (1/2 c.) Fat-free milk (2 c.) Applesauce muffins (3)	Banana (1) Oatmeal (1 c. dry) Muffins (3) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Orange (1) Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Quick bread (4 slices) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Grapefruit juice (1 c.) Scrambled eggs (2) Toasted whole-grain bread (2)
LUNCH						
Braised turkey (6 oz.) with gravy Baked potatoes (2 med.) Green beans (1/2 10 oz.-package.) Biscuits (2) Pudding	Turkey-potato salad on lettuce leaves (2) Biscuits (3)	Grilled cheese (4 oz.) sandwich (2) Carrot sticks (about 1 carrot)	Taco salad Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Split pea soup (2 2/3 c.) Cottage cheese (1 c.) on lettuce leaves (2) Crackers (24)	Tuna salad with lettuce on whole wheat roll (2) Hot potato salad	Split pea soup (2 2/3 c.) Mixed green salad with tomato
DINNER						
Cheeseburger w/ whole-grain hamburger roll (2 oz. cheese, 1/2 lb. lean ground beef or turkey) (2 rolls) Banana (2)	Bean tamale pie Lettuce (1/3 lb.) wedge with dressing (2 T.) Crackers (24) Snack cake (2 slices)	Turkey Spanish rice Green pepper sticks (1 pepper) Apple (1) wedges Toast (2 slices) Snack cake (2 slices)	Quick pizza Lettuce (1/3 lb.) wedge with dressing (2 T.) Peach halves (4)	Beef and peppers Rice (1/3 c. dry) Chopped broccoli (1/2 10 oz.-pkg.) Apple cobbler (half)	Spaghetti with sauce Lettuce (1/3 lb.) wedge with dressing (2 T.) Garlic bread	Beef with noodles Chopped broccoli (1/2 10 oz.-pkg.) Apple (1) wedges Quick bread (4 slices)
SNACK						
Toast (4 slices) with peanut butter (2 T.)	Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Muffins (2) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Fruit	Quick bread (4 slices)	Apple cobbler (half)	Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Fat-free milk (2 c.)



Thrifty Menus for Small Families: Week 2

Amounts to serve *two people* are shown in parentheses after most of the foods on the menu. The recipes for foods in bold print are included in other fact sheets in the “Thrifty Recipes for Small Families” series. Serving sizes are shown on the recipes.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
BREAKFAST						
Banana (1) Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Toast (2 slices) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Orange (1) quarters Oatmeal (1 c. dry) Biscuits (3) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Banana (1) Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Toasted quick bread (2 slices) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Orange (1) quarters Scrambled eggs (2) with cheese (2 oz.) Toast (4 slices)	Grapefruit (1) halves Ready-to-eat cereal (3 oz.) Toasted quick bread (2 slices) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Orange (1) quarters Oatmeal (1 c. dry) Muffins (2) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Grapefruit (1) halves Eggs (2) Lean ham Toasted whole-grain rolls (2)
LUNCH						
Roast Pork (4.5 oz.) Baked potatoes (2 large) Celery-carrot salad Biscuits (3)	Pork fajitas (4) Melon wedges (2 slices)	Pork (4.5 oz.) sandwich (2) Vegetable relish tray	Barbecue beef sandwich Potato salad	Cheese (2 oz.) and lean ham sandwich (2) Broccoli soup (2 c.) Carrot-raisin bars (6)	Sliced chicken, shredded lettuce-carrot sandwich Apple (1) slices Bread pudding (1 c.)	Quick pizza Pear (1) slices
DINNER						
Cheeseburger on roll (4 oz. cheese, 1/2 lb lean ground beef, 2 whole-grain hamburger rolls) Creole beans Pear (1) slices	Sesame fish Boiled potatoes (2 med.) Chopped kale (1/2 10-oz.-pkg.) Quick bread (4 slices)	Ground turkey (1/2 lb.) patties Macaroni salad Celery sticks (about 1 to 1 1/2 stalks) Biscuits (3)	Eggs Foo Yung Steamed rice Mixed vegetables (1 c.) Quick bread (4 slices)	Stove top beans Chopped kale (1/2 10-oz.-pkg.) Muffins (3) Pudding (1 c.)	Stuffed peppers, microwave Green beans (1 c.) Garlic rolls (2) Carrot-raisin bars (6)	Grilled frankfurter slices (8 oz.) on noodles (1 1/4 c. dry) Stove top beans (2 c.) Apple (1) slices Carrot-raisin bars (6)
SNACK						
Graham crackers (6) with peanut butter (3 T.)	Popcorn (1/3 c. dry)	Toast (2 slices) with peanut butter (2 T.)	Carrot-raisin bars (6) Fat-free milk (2 c.)	Graham crackers (6) with peanut butter (3 T.)	Popcorn (1/3 c. dry)	Muffins (3) Fat-free milk (2 c.)