

Real Savings on Real Food

Since August 2020, prices for "food at home" (groceries) have increased by **20%** according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the steepest inflation seen since the 1970s.

It's easy to think about eating at home as "expensive," which makes going out seem like a better idea, especially when combined with the convenience of a restaurant. However, dining out prices have increased even more. In general, **eating out in most U.S. cities is now 48.5% more expensive than 10 years ago**, according to Consumer Price Index data. Eating at **10 of the most popular fast food restaurants has gotten 63% more expensive since 2014**.

Eating out affects more than just your budget. Excessive amounts of fat, salt and sugar, along with oversized portions, can make these choices costly for your body as well as your wallet. Over time, those decisions can translate into medical costs associated with diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and more.

So what can you do?

Step 1: Start by assessing the total cost of the food you eat. You might be stunned when you do the math. Collect your receipts for a month and then chart the following:

- _____ Money I spent eating out (this includes coffee, fast food, sit-down restaurants, bakeries, etc.)
- _____ Money I spent on food with no nutritional value (soda, sweets, salty snacks, alcohol)
- _____ Money I spent on fruits, vegetables and protein (meat, fish, cheese, legumes)

What does the math tell you? Where can you most effectively spend your time to reduce costs?

Step 2: Adjust your approach to spending. Here are a host of practical ideas to help you develop new patterns or find savings. Find more ideas at realfoodcan.com by searching "Affordable Food."

- **Shop the sales.** Most grocery stores publish an online weekly sales flyer. You can often find "stock up" deals on pantry staples, and sale prices on fresh fruits and veggies that are in season. You'll also find weekly specials on meat and frozen veggies, which are a great alternative to fresh.
- **Invest in a vacuum sealer.** If you freeze a package of meat from the store, it will develop freezer burn in just a few weeks. For around \$50, you can pick up a vacuum sealer that will keep air out of your meat and extend its freezer life by months. That allows you to buy larger packages of meat, or buy multiples when they are on sale. Sub-divide, label and freeze your meat for later. You can recoup this investment very quickly through cost savings and reduced waste.
- **Leverage non-meat proteins.** Did you know that legumes such as black beans, pinto beans and lentils have high protein and high fiber with virtually no fat? You can substitute some legumes for meat in many recipes. For example: reduce your ground beef in tacos by using half pinto beans, or cut down the meat in chili and add more black beans.
- **Meal plan around sales.** The grocery store typically puts in-season fresh foods on sale. A meal plan helps ensure that you use what you purchase, without waste or unnecessary expense.



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Strategies & Savings

After you do some research, identify the top five strategies you are going to employ to keep your food budget in check. Remember the tradeoff: in order to save money, you will spend some time.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now implement these strategies for a month, and do the math from the front page again. How do your results stack up?

	Eating Out	Junk Food	Real Food
Last Month	\$_____	\$_____	\$_____
This Month	\$_____	\$_____	\$_____

Which strategies worked well? Where do you want to do more work? How much time are you able/willing to spend? Every person and family is different. The goal is not to get to zero of anything....it's to educate yourself and make conscious choices so you can fuel your body with the healthiest, most budget-friendly options.

Additional Resources

- [20 Money-Saving Grocery Tips](#)
- [Eat Right When the Money's Tight](#)
- [Spend Smart. Eat Smart.](#)
- [Meal a Day: Feed 4 for Less Than \\$10](#)



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