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Eating Right When Money's Tight

By Jackie Newgent, RD, CDN

It costs more to eat right, right? According to Keri M. Gans, MS, RD, CDN, author of *The Small Change Diet*, the answer to that is clearly "wrong."

Eating well can fit well within anyone's budget. Just like anything, all it takes is a little advance planning. Guys, that includes you. Gans says, "Just because men generally need more calories than women, doesn't mean they need to break the bank to enjoy lean and manly meals."

Try some of these top strategies for healthful eating on a lean budget.

Pre-Game Plan

- Go for a green thumb. To save green, cultivate some of your own vegetables, fruits, or herbs. Ask a garden center expert for tips on what grows best in your region. Choose at least three seed packets, seedlings, or plants.
- Steer clear of a ravenous appetite. "When you're over-hungry, you may wind up over-eating—and over-spending," says Gans. Have a plan of a snack so that you don't make a bad investment in foods that lack sufficient nutrients.
- Land a good deal. Real men know how to buy low ... and clip coupons! Just be sure to use coupons only on foods that you need.

At the Market

- Satisfy before you shop. Shopping on an empty stomach can lead to "grocery goggles" ... where everything looks good and you ultimately buy excess unhealthful items—or too much, period! Gans suggests, "Enjoy a grab-and-go snack, like an apple and string cheese, about 20 to 30 minutes before your shopping trip, to help signal your brain that you're stomach is satisfied—and to forgo buyer's remorse."
- Peruse the perimeter. Most foods for a health- and cost-conscious eating plan are found by shopping the supermarket's boundary. Then, with your shopping list in tow, visit just the aisles you need to balance fresh selections. (See [Aisle by Aisle Top Picks](#).)
- Draft a produce dream team. Choose a variety of in-season whole fresh fruits and vegetables. They'll be most abundant, most nutritious, and least expensive. Alternatively, pick by sports seasons—enjoy citrus fruits and sweet potatoes during football season; buy berries and tomatoes during baseball season.

At Work and at Play

- Get sacked. Though it's possible to eat out and eat right, the sure bet for savoring a right-priced, right-sized lunch is to prepare you own often and take it to work. Always include at least one serving of veggies and fruits in it.
- Aim for healthy competition. Extreme eating, such as determining who can devour the biggest steak, is suited for unfit men with fat wallets. So go for a new game ... perhaps a competition for spending the least on the most healthful food? Participate in company-provided wellness programming, too. Many programs have competitive components.
- Unzip when zapped. Don't get caught with an appetite and without a healthful snack on hand when stuck in traffic, in a meeting, or unexpectedly away from home. Gans suggests carrying a small zip-top bag containing an energetic snack, like roasted edamame or a mixture of high fiber cereal and nuts.

Out and About

- Be slow about fast food. Gans says, "You can selectively enjoy budget-friendly fast food and still have a fit physique." Many quick-service restaurants now offer some better-for-you foods. Check nutrition facts online.
- Maneuver the menu. Decide that your tactic is to not stick with the tried and true. Ask the server questions and make requests, like "hold the gravy" or "steamed vegetables instead of fries, please." Also, check if right-portioned or healthful options are highlighted—then choose one.
- Have a game plan for game-time grub. Start with un-fried vegetables for the gang. Add hot sauce for gruffer appeal. Instead of nibbling on two or three fried appetizers, decide on one. And order a pitcher of water with every pitcher of beer—then quench your thirst with a glass of water between beers.

Above all, know that you can enjoy the taste of eating right ... even when money's tight.

Aisle by Aisle Top Picks

Gans suggests regularly tossing these items into your shopping cart to assure you have the basics for a buff body on a tight budget:

- Produce: variety of in-season selections
- Bakery: whole grain bread loaf
- Canned Food: canned (or dry) beans
- Grain: brown rice or quinoa
- Cereal: whole rolled oats
- Dairy: large container low-fat Greek yogurt
- Proteins: a dozen eggs
- Freezer: frozen veggies of choice
- Bulk Bins: various nuts

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