

# Ideas for Planning Thrifty Menus

Bulletin #4331



If you like, use the sample menus in *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families* for a week or two. Then start to plan your own menus. To stick to your food budget,

- choose low-cost foods;
- use smaller amounts of meat, poultry and fish;
- Feature grain products;
- alter favorite recipes;
- avoid waste: plan for leftovers;
- make your own convenience mixes.

## Choose Low-Cost Foods

Low-cost meals do not have to be dull or lack variety. There are many low-cost, nutritious foods from which to choose. In fact, many favorite foods are low in cost. These foods are used in the sample menus.

Some foods (soda pop, candy, alcohol, coffee and tea) are not in the menus because they are both high in cost and low in nutrients. Some convenience foods, such as pastries and prepared foods, aren't in the menus either. Convenience foods sometimes cost more than similar foods you make at home. To get nutritious meals at low cost, you want most of your food money to pay off in nutrients.



*Ground beef or turkey, chicken, beef chuck steak, and turkey parts are usually good meat buys.*

*Plain frozen and canned vegetables often cost much less than vegetables sold with seasonings and sauces*

Hamburger on whole wheat roll

Turkey potato salad

Noodles

Lettuce wedge with dressing

Toasted hamburger rolls

Beef and peppers

Rice

Chopped broccoli

Apple cobbler

Chicken stew

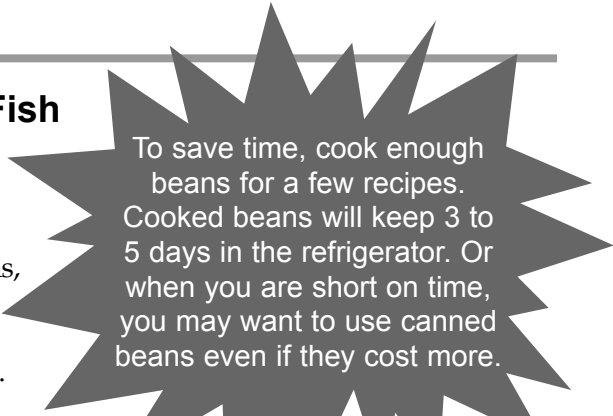
Chopped kale

Muffins

Bread pudding

## Use Smaller Amounts of Meat, Poultry and Fish

Meat is a good source of several nutrients, but most meats are more expensive than other foods. Try combining small amounts of lower-cost meats, poultry and fish with bread, cereal, rice, pasta or potatoes for hearty main dishes. Dry beans, dry peas, eggs and peanut butter can be used often in casseroles, soups, salads and snacks. They provide the same nutrients as meat at lower cost, and may be lower in fat, too.



**NOON**  
Pork or sliced turkey sandwich  
Bean vegetable combo

**EVENING**  
Ground beef patties  
Macaroni and cheese salad  
Celery sticks  
Biscuits

**SNACK**  
Toast with peanut butter

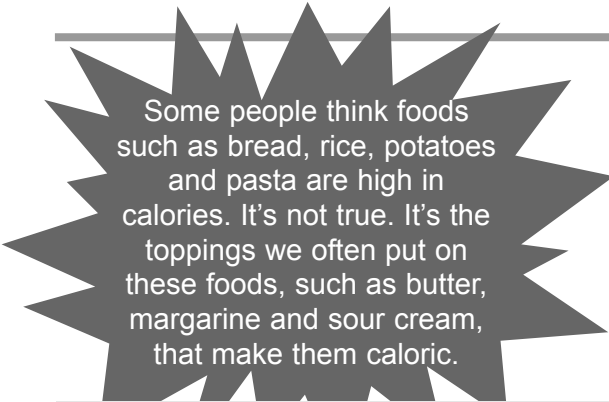
*Potatoes in this main dish salad stretch food dollars by making the turkey go further.*

*Meat alternates, including cooked, dry beans and peanut butter, are used in different ways to add variety at low cost.*

**NOON**  
Turkey-potato salad on lettuce  
Biscuits

**EVENING**  
Bean tamale pie  
Lettuce wedge with dressing  
Crackers  
Peanut butter cookie

**SNACK**  
Cereal  
Fat-free milk



## Feature Grain Products

Enriched and whole-grain products are among the most economical sources of many vitamins and minerals. They can be a real plus in your diet. The sample menus in the bulletin #4330, *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*, may use more grains than you now eat, but you may be surprised at the different ways they are used.

**MORNING**  
Banana  
Oatmeal  
Toasted biscuit  
Milk

**NOON**  
Grilled cheese sandwich  
Carrot sticks

*These menus use a lot of low-cost cereals, bread, rice and pasta foods. Such foods provide many nutrients at bargain prices.*

**EVENING**  
Turkey Spanish rice  
Green beans  
Apple wedges  
Toast  
Peanut butter cookie

**SNACK**  
Cornmeal chips

## Alter Favorite Recipes

You don't have to throw out the recipes and cookbooks that you have been using for years. Altering recipes to substitute low fat ingredients for high fat ingredients doesn't have to change the taste of your food.

Simple changes can make your food lower in fat and lower in calories, so it's healthier for you. Here are a few examples to try.



Recipe Substitutions	
If your recipe calls for	Use this instead
Whole milk	Fat-free milk
Evaporated milk or cream	Evaporated skim milk
1 cup of butter or margarine	1/2 cup margarine plus 1/4 cup prune puree. (For some baked foods, you can substitute applesauce, plain yogurt or prune butter or puree for equal amounts of fat. Try it out to see what works best for you.)
Shortening or lard	Soft margarine (The texture of some baked goods is changed significantly when light margarine is used, and so is not recommended for baking.)
Mayonnaise or salad dressing	Nonfat or light mayonnaise or salad dressing; mustard in sandwiches
1 whole egg	1/4 cup egg substitute or 2 egg whites
Cheese	Lower fat cheeses
Cream cheese	Nonfat or light cream cheese
Sour cream	Nonfat or lowfat sour cream or yogurt
Fat for greasing pans	Nonstick cooking spray
1 ounce baking chocolate	3 tablespoons cocoa powder plus 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Regular bouillon or broth	Low-sodium bouillon and broth
Pork bacon	Turkey bacon, lean ham or Canadian bacon
Pork sausage	Ground skinless turkey
Ground beef or pork	Ground skinless turkey

**Applesauce muffins**

*Use lower fat substitutes when baking.*

**Fat-free milk**

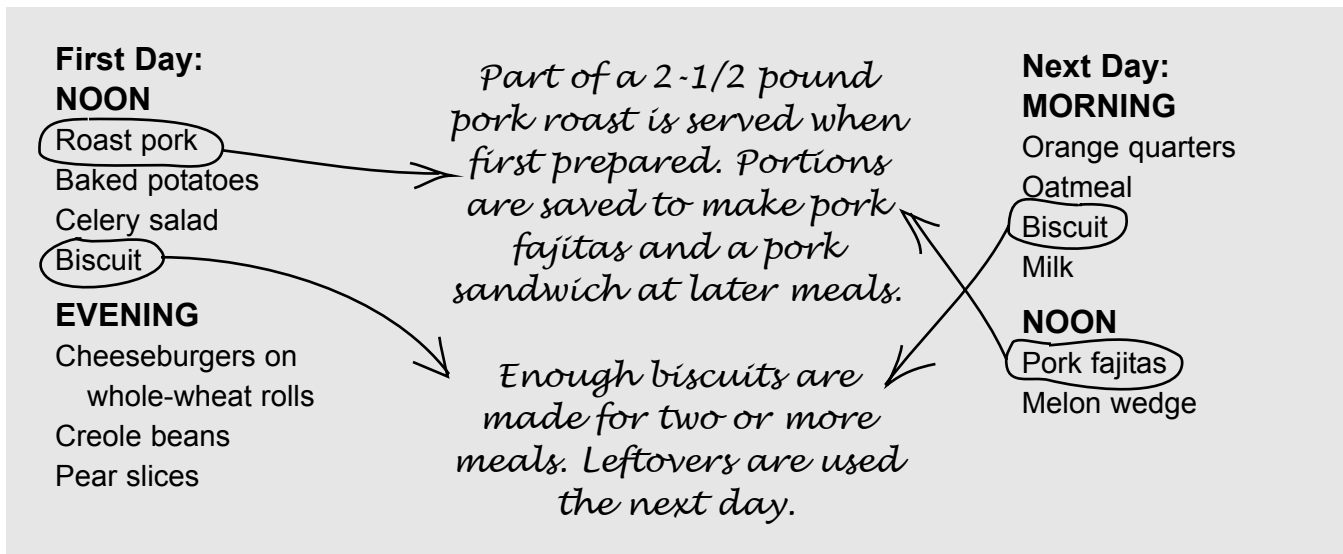
*Use fat-free milk to drink and in cooking.*

**Ground turkey patties**

*Use ground turkey in place of ground beef.*

## Avoid Waste: Plan for Leftovers

Many foods don't come in packages small enough for one or two people. Buying larger packages than you really need sometimes results in wasted food. And that means money down the drain. To avoid waste, try the "planned-over" idea. "Planned-over" means planning ahead to buy or prepare amounts of food that give you servings for more than one meal. Simply, planning for leftovers. For example, consider preparing a recipe for four and serving it twice. Or try cooking a large cut of meat or whole chicken. Eat some, and save the rest to use in other main dishes. The menus in bulletin #4330, *Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families*, include planned-over recipes for braised turkey and beef chuck steak (Week 1). The menus for Week 2 include planned-over recipes for pork roast. "Planned-over" ideas like the two from the menus below can help.



## Make Your Own Convenience Mixes

Everyone needs to get meals on the table fast sometimes. But store-bought convenience foods can be expensive. To help solve the problem, you can make your own low-cost convenience foods. The biscuit mix recipe in bulletin #4334, *Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts* is used in the menus to make muffins, apple cobbler and biscuits. This mix will keep up to three months in the refrigerator. There is a pudding mix and a meatball mix, too.

## Other fact sheets in this series include:

- Planning Thrifty Meals for Small Families, Bulletin #4330
- Buying Food for Thrifty Small Families, Bulletin #4332
- Thrifty Recipes: Main Dishes, Bulletin #4333
- Thrifty Recipes: Salads and Soups, Breads and Desserts, Bulletin #4334

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