

 <p>www.brownboxorganics.com</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Healthy Meals on a Tight Budget</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr. Karen Benton, Naturopathic Physician</p>	<p><i>Brown Box Organics not only offers free home or office organic produce and specialized grocery deliveries but also curbside pick up on call-ahead orders.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(208) 362-5677</p>
---	--	---

Just because you are on a tight budget, doesn't mean you can't cook healthy and attractive meals for you and your family. Here are some helpful hints to help you get the best from the foods you choose.

Choosing the Best Foods When You Eat. The nutrition basics indicate you need 25%-30% protein, 35-40% carbohydrate and 25%-30% fats in your diet each day. However, this means "good" carbohydrate = whole grains, and "good" fats which means no trans fats. The best proteins are meats, fish, eggs, etc. that have no hormone additives. Eating protein at breakfast really helps get your brain get "in gear" for the rest of the day. Oatmeal and cereals are carbohydrates, not protein. Add a few almonds or walnuts to cereals to increase the protein content. Peanut butter can also be a good choice. Eating a nut "fat" with a carbohydrate (apple, banana, whole grain) can help avoid blood sugar spikes too. Other good fats and protein include canned salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, etc.

Choosing Fresh. When you can get fresh fruits and vegetables do so. Try to pick those fresh carrots, squash, turnips, potatoes, onions, etc. The nutrient content for most fresh foods is greater than boxed, canned or frozen foods. Most root vegetables can be roasted in the oven with a little olive oil and seasonings. Apples are best cored, baked, and sprinkled with cinnamon.

Cooked turnips can be added to mashed potatoes for a tasty treat.

For acorn squash soup, simply cut the squash in half, remove the seeds, cover each half with aluminium foil and bake in an oven at 350° for an hour or two until soft. You can mash, add some cooked carrots (for sweetness) and some broth along with a little margarine, salt and pepper, and a little garlic, and you have a nutritious soup.

Spices. Helpful spices in your pantry include: dried Italian seasonings, garlic powder, mustard, ketchup, onion powder, thickening (arrowroot, cornstarch or tapioca), sea salt, black pepper, chili powder, Liquid Aminos, soy sauce (wheat free tamari, shoyu etc.) olive oil, vinegar (apple cider, white, balsamic) and cinnamon. Of course, fresh herbs are tastier than dried herbs, but are often not available. Good fresh choices are parsley and rosemary.

Meats. Stretch your budget by using a little meat or protein added to everything else. Soups and stews are a great way to do this. Simply buy 1-2 strips of bacon, a ham hock or cut up 1-2 of those frozen chicken, beef or pork filets that you find in the mark-down meat section of your local grocery store. Sausage links are also a good addition to bean soups and stews.

A good way to make some of these into a tasty veggie, meat rice stir fry is to marinate a little of the chicken or beef in some olive oil, a little garlic, and soy sauce overnight. Grated fresh ginger root, is a nice, but not necessary addition. For rice stir fry, be sure to refrigerate your rice beforehand. Even 1 strip of diced bacon can add some good flavor to a rice, veggie stir fry or bean soup.

Cooking Tips. Tiny chunks (or shredded) vegetables and meats add more flavor. The surface area is greater, and will add more intensity to your dish. Plus, often it will look more attractive. In salads, shredded carrots, finely chopped zucchini, yellow zucchini squash, grated cheese etc. will really enhance the looks of what you have, and add variety. A few (shelled) sunflower nuts to salads add some protein!

Stocking Your Pantry. When I'm cooking on a budget, I think about what can be done with the least amount of ingredients. Here are some of my favorites:

Tomatoes—diced, stewed, sauce, paste, juice, dried.

Dried beans and legumes - soak beans overnight before cooking, great for soups and stews. Lentils don't require soaking.

Eggs-Egg substitute works OK in baking

Flour-spelt or whole grain, keep in refrigerator to avoid bugs

Butter- if you can afford it, is a nice addition. You can always mix a little with olive oil for more flavor.

Sugar-honey, maple syrup, or fruit puree (prune, apple, etc.)

Milk-powdered, whole, 2%, evaporated etc. Powdered is fine for baking.

Bread crumbs/croutons-Make your own from stale bread, toast and crush. (Those pork chops taste great oven baked and coated with toasted bread crumbs and Italian seasoning.) Bakeries often will dispose of outdated breads and pastries.

Raisins. Sweet treats and good additions to pork, apples etc.

Cheese-choose the most flavor (sharp) if possible. Grate or shred for most flavor.

Broth-homemade, extract or cubes (canned or boxed =\$\$) When making your own broth and soups, I find roasting the chicken or turkey first is a good way to add extra flavor with the crisped skin. You can always skim the fat afterwards when the broth/soup is cooled in the refrigerator. Using a little of the broth extract can really punch up the flavor of your own home-made broth and soups.

Quick 'N Easy Minestrone

1-2 teaspoon Italian seasoning

4 cups tomato or vegetable juice (V-8 works well)

4 cups broth or 2 cups water/2 cups broth (use vegetable, beef or chicken to taste)

2 cups shredded cabbage

3 small zucchini

garlic powder

4 tsp dehydrated onion

½ cup sliced mushrooms

1 1/3 cups frozen mixed vegetables (or combination of green beans, lima beans, corn etc.)

Simmer at least 1 hour. Better if reheated. (This recipe may also be placed in a crockpot and simmered for several hours. Add mushrooms during the last portion of cooking.) Some pre-cooked elbow macaroni also can be added during the last 10 minutes of cooking.

