

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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No one needs to remind you that times are tight, budgets are tight, and it's getting harder to feed a family. Yes, mac 'n cheese is inexpensive, but there are healthier ways to go before we get there. If you need just one word to help you manage the pennies, that word is PLAN.

Planning might seem like a lot of bother, but it is the best way to get the most for your money. And while it might take a little longer if you're not used to doing any planning, before long it will be as easy. Why plan? It helps you stick to what you *need* to buy, not what looks good at the moment. It also helps you get the best and most value for your money. And done well, it can also save you a lot of time. When you get a good deal on a chicken that turns one cooking into 2 or 3 meals for your family you'll see the difference. Having a list also makes it easier for you to impress on your children the fact that they can't get all the treats they might have been used to. Tell them "If Mr. List doesn't say so, we can't buy it."

So, ready to PLAN? Here's how to start. Get 2 pieces of paper and a pen. On one paper make a list of the meals your family likes. Beside them, list the ingredients you need to prepare them. Look for several foods that have the same main ingredient. Or if you have grilled chicken and fajitas, they can both use chicken.

Now, list the days of next week, Sunday, Monday... Start filling in which meal you would like to serve on each day. Plan to use beans as the main course at least one

day each week. Beans are good protein with lots of fiber and they don't cost much. Canned beans are easy to prepare and won't spoil on the shelf. Put at least 2 meals on the list that use the same main ingredient. If you bake chicken for dinner one day, you can save enough meat to wrap in tortillas for fajitas the next day.

Plan at least 2 or 3 vegetables for each meal that has meat. Vegetables fill us up and keep us full longer than meat. Whole grains such as brown rice and barley also have fiber to fill us up. Most of us eat a lot more expensive meat than we need, and don't get nearly as many vegetables or whole grains as we should. Use just a little meat to flavor all the vegetables and grains!

Next step in planning - pull out the grocery ads. Look for what's on sale this week. If chicken is on sale but you planned to use ground beef, maybe you can change your menu. Or, get the chicken now and keep it frozen for next week. If you can, compare the ads from several stores. With the cost of gas so high it's not usually worth it to go run to several stores each week. Go to one this week and another one next week. Pick which one to go to depending on what they have on sale.

Now on the second piece of paper make a list of what you need to buy, and head for the store. In the store, look at the UNIT PRICE. That's the little number on the shelf tag that says "cents per ounce". If one box of cereal costs \$2.59, but the unit cost is \$0.59 per ounce, and another one costs \$3.99 but the unit cost is \$0.41 per ounce, you get a lot more food for your money with the second box.

If you have coupons, compare the unit prices with the coupon to cheaper brands. Sometimes the coupon is still more expensive. It's often, but not always, cheaper to buy the store brand instead of a national brand. Often bigger packages have lower unit

prices than small packages. Just buy what is on your list, unless you find a really good sale of something you know your family will eat. Don't buy it if you don't know how you'll use it. And don't put chips, cookies, deli meats, soda, bakery or convenience foods into your shopping cart until you know you have money left over from the foods on your list. These foods usually cost a lot for the amount of nutrition they give you. They're not worth it today!

This recipe is a different and healthy way to serve spaghetti. Use store brand spaghetti sauce and get frozen fish fillets without breading.

Fish with a Spaghetti Crust

4 frozen fish fillets without breading, thawed 1/4 tsp dried dillweed, optional

1 Cup low fat marinara sauce or meatless spaghetti sauce pepper to taste

2 ounces dry, thin spaghetti or other thin pasta pan spray

Boil the pasta in water until it's just barely tender. Do not overcook. Drain and rinse quickly in cold water. Drain well and pat light with paper towels to dry. Chop into short pieces. Preheat oven to 450° F. Spray a baking sheet with pan spray. Pat fish fillets dry. Put the chopped pasta in a shallow bowl and press fish into it until one side is coated. Lay fillets on baking sheet, pasta side up. Sprinkle with pepper and dillweed. Spray with pan spray. Bake 8 to 10 minutes, until fish flakes easily. Heat spaghetti sauce and serve over the baked fish. Serves 4.

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