

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Healthy and Affordable New Year, Organically

Happy New Year to you and your family! Was one of your New Year's resolutions to eat more healthfully this year? Many people intend to improve their eating habits, and there are many ways to do so. But some folks are all ready eating a fairly balanced diet, not a lot of junk food, healthy snacks, doing all the 'right' things. They might consider that 'going organic' would be the next thing to do, but are concerned that they can't afford to buy all organic foods. If you did a quick survey of the cost of organics you might agree.

But there ways to include organics in your diet without breaking your budget or your diet. First consider that you don't have to switch 'cold turkey' to all organic. There are several USDA levels of organic. If a food has the round, green and white USDA Organic tag it can say either '100% organic', or just 'organic'. If it is 'organic' then at least 70% of the ingredients are organic. Or, it might just say that certain ingredients, such as the flour or the eggs, are organic. Take a look at what concerns you most. Often something with just the main ingredients organics will not be as costly as 100% organic.

Consider what you can do for yourself. While buying organic, peeled baby carrots is very convenient, you can get organic whole large carrots for much less. If you can peel and chop the carrots yourself, you'll save a bundle. The same is true for most prepared and convenience foods. Buying organic canned tomatoes and organic spaghetti will cost less and make much more food than buying canned spaghetti in

sauce. Dig out a cookbook, watch a cooking show, and make your own casseroles using organic ingredients. You'll be able to afford more organics that way!

Consider what it is that you most want to avoid by buying organic foods. If you are concerned about possible pesticide residues, then just switching a few produce items will make a big dent in the amount of pesticide you are exposed to. While no single food is the main or only source, there are some that are more likely to carry unwanted chemicals than others. Apples, celery, strawberries and peaches top the list. So, if you can only afford one or two items, buy these as organics. And make your own applesauce from the organic apples!

Another way to keep the costs down with organic produce is to eat seasonally. This is what our grandparents did before we had cross-country and around-the-world transportation. Whether you plant your own garden or not, think of what's growing now when you make a shopping list. Buy organic pears in the fall when they are harvested, organic strawberries in the next month or two. Then skip those fruits for the rest of the year, when 'fresh' in the grocery store means it was shipped in from thousands of miles away. If you can, find a local farm or a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation near you to join. That way you'll not only be getting local, super-fresh produce you'll be supporting a local business as well.

Another hint is to look for the supermarket brand organics. Many of the large chain grocery stores now carry their own line of organic items. As with most products, the chain brand is usually less expensive than a big-label organic. Some items may be available in bulk, which can be much less costly. But only buy bulk if you have space and containers to store large amounts. Organic paper towels you can store anywhere,

organic brown rice needs bug-proof storage or you'll be raising a healthy crop of weevils! And of course, checking for store coupons and specials is a popular way to save dollars.

Here's a flavorful way to use the last of the fresh cranberries while they're in season, and have a quick breakfast or snack on hand. Happy, Healthy New Year!

Cranberry Nut Muffins

½ cup margarine, softened

1 cup sugar

2 eggs or substitute

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 cup plain, low fat yogurt

2 cups all purpose flour

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

½ tsp ground nutmeg

¼ tsp salt

¾ cup chopped fresh cranberries

½ cup chopped pecans or other nuts

Preheat oven to 400°F. Put muffin papers in 16 cups in muffin pan. Cream margarine and sugar until fluffy. Beat in eggs one at a time. Stir in vanilla and yogurt. Combine flour, baking powder and soda, nutmeg and salt in small bowl. Stir into margarine mixture just until moistened. Fold in cranberries and nuts. Divide batter into the 16 muffin papers. Bake 20-25 minutes, until toothpick comes out clean from center.

Makes 16 muffins.