Planning meals, improving shopping habits, cooking, and storing food wisely can help you cope with rising food costs. Getting the most from your food dollars will help you to get the nutrition you need to stay healthy or recover from an illness.

Planning

- Try to plan before you go to the market. Use MyPlate to plan meals for one week. Stick to your food budget.
- Check newspapers, on-line ads, and sales coupons for foods you can buy on special at the local market. Write a shopping list and stick to it.
- Buy fresh foods in season, and remember it is almost always cheaper to buy food in bulk.
- Try to replace expensive ingredients with low-cost foods like beans, eggs, or peanut butter. Carrots, greens, potatoes, apples, and bananas are typically good choices.
- Stretch meat by serving it in dishes such as soups, stews, or casseroles.
- Spice up leftovers by using them in new ways. For example, try leftover chicken in a salad or casserole.

Shopping

- Avoid buying items that aren’t on your list.
- Don’t shop when you are hungry.
- Buy foods that spoil quickly in amounts that you need. Larger containers are not cheaper if wasted.
- When prices are lower, try to stock up on items that don’t spoil.
- Try store brand products. They are often just as good.
- Compare unit price – the cost per ounce or cost per serving. Most stores have this listed on the product shelves.
• Read nutrition labels. Similar products may differ a little in price, but if the lower priced product is not as good for you, it may be worth the few extra cents for the other product.

• Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season; they are easy to get, have more flavor, and usually cost less.

• Using frozen packaged meals regularly can be costly, but you may need them at times when you can’t cook and no one is there to cook for you. If you have the freezer space, stock up during a sale. Compare packaged products, and look for foods that are low in sodium and fat.

• Vitamins, minerals, or herbal products are costly and can be harmful. Only a doctor should be prescribing special vitamins or minerals based on a medical need. Always check with your doctor before buy these vitamin and herbal products.

• Plant a garden and grow your own fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruit. Look for books at your local library or go on-line for tips.

Preparing and Storing Food

• To preserve vitamins, don’t overcook vegetables and pastas to the soft mushy state. Follow cooking instructions. Steaming or microwaving vegetables helps preserve their vitamin content.

• Avoid waste by storing foods properly.

• Wrap foods to retain freshness.

• Date and rotate foods so that you use the oldest food first.

• Freeze foods in portion sizes that can be used without waste.

• Freeze leftovers for later use in soups.

• Check food in your refrigerator for expiration dates and spoilage. If you are in doubt about a food’s past use date or spoilage, throw it out.

Talk with your dietitian, nurse, or doctor, about any questions or concerns you may have about your diet.