

Cost Effective Shopping for Child Care

Cost effective shopping can help you save money in your facility. It can help you stretch your food dollars and food budget. What exactly is cost effective shopping? It is purchasing food that meets your needs, while getting the best buy for your food dollar.

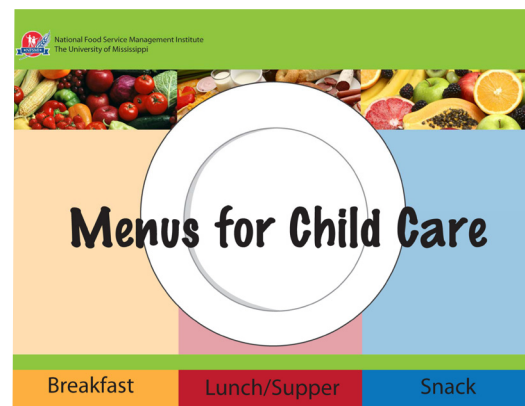


budget. Would you like to spend approximately the same amount of money this year or less? When looking at last years budget, separate food from non-food items to get a better picture of actual expenses by category.

2. **Use Cycle Menus.** A cycle menu is a set of established menus repeated on a periodic basis. Plan cycle menus to meet the nutritional needs of children and to balance cost. Balance cost by combining high cost foods with lower priced foods and averaging the final cost. Routinely offer dry beans and peas on your menus. They are an excellent source of protein, high in fiber, naturally low in fat, and an important source of many nutrients. Dry beans and peas are usually less expensive than meat. Plan menus using seasonal foods when possible. Buying foods in season will help to stretch your food dollars. To locate foods in season, go to <http://snap.nal.usda.gov>.

There are 7 basic steps to cost effective shopping.

1. **Determine a food budget, beginning with the end in mind.** How much money would you like to spend on food per week, per month, or per term? If you're not sure, then look at last year's food receipts by month to forecast your





3. **Make a grocery list.**

Always check to see what you have on hand before shopping. No need to buy something you already have!



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Only purchase what is on your grocery list. Resist impulse shopping. Do not shop when you are hungry; you will tend to purchase more groceries not on your shopping list. Shop without the children if possible. Children can be very distracting and increase your chances of purchasing more impulse items.

4. **Compare pricing between food items by using unit pricing.** What is unit pricing? It is the price per unit listed on store shelves usually below the food. Unit pricing will show the price per ounce, pound, etc. of a particular food. Use this information to compare different brands. Compare the unit price for food items in large and small package sizes. Sometimes, larger containers are less expensive, but not always. Always compare the unit price for the best deal. Compare store brands to major brands. The quality many times is the same, and the cost savings can be significant. Considering purchasing food in bulk, if the unit price is better. Make sure you have the storage space and that the food item will not lose quality before you can use it. Wasting food is not saving money!

5. **Look at convenience and processed foods you purchase.** The cost per serving may be higher than homemade products. Is the convenience worth the price? If you make the product from scratch, can you afford the labor cost? Do you have staff skilled enough to make the product? Which will provide more nutrition for the children in your facility? These are some of the questions you need to ask yourself to determine if convenience or processed foods are a good purchase.





6. **Use coupons and sales for items you normally purchase.** Compare the cost of a store brand to a name brand with a coupon. The store brand may still be less expensive, even without a coupon. Using coupons does not automatically translate into saving money! Know your unit prices for various food items.

7. **Read the Nutrition Facts Labels and compare food items to get the best deal on nutrition.** Leave the “empty calorie” food items behind, such as candy, cakes, sweets, and sweetened beverage drinks. They provide very few nutrients for the dollar cost. Focus on nutrient dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, and lean meats that provide a wide variety of vitamins and minerals.

If you follow these tips, you will be well on your way to stretching your food dollars and your food budget. Happy shopping!

Sources

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. SNAP-Ed Connection Website. Last Modified: June 30, 2011.

Retrieved June 15, 2011, from <http://snap.nal.usda.gov>

National Food Service Management Institute. (2003). *From the Trainer's Tablet: Lessons for Family/Home Child Care Providers*.