

NEWS RELEASE

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SECRETS TO COMBATING HIGH GROCERY PRICES

If you have shopped your local grocery store lately, you have noticed food costs have risen over the past few months. Food costs will continue to rise throughout 2022 and likely into 2023. According to US Department of Agriculture (USDA), consumers are paying more for every category of food. The only category of food that may have a downward trend in cost is fresh vegetables.

Several factors play into rising food costs. Inflation is at an all-time high. In fact, we are seeing the highest year-over-year increase in inflation since 1981 according to U.S. Consumer Price Index. The good news is, there are some things you can do to help your food dollar go further.

- **Know how much you have to spend.** Start by looking at your overall household budget.

If you do not have a budget, you need to know where your money is going.

Look for areas that you can cut back on, at least temporarily. Can you eat out less often?

Maybe you can cut back on miscellaneous items. Can you grow your own groceries?

- **Plan your meals.** Plan what you will prepare for the next week or two. Fourth of July is around the corner. Do you plan to have family and friends over? If so, you need to consider the extra cost of food for your celebration. As you plan meals, take a look at what you already have on hand and try to plan meals around those items in the pantry, refrigerator, or freezer. Make sure they are nutritious.

- **Create a grocery list.** Once your meals are planned for the week, make a grocery list of all needed items. This will help prevent multiple trips to the grocery store where you may be tempted to purchase other items not on the list. Be sure to take your list with you.

There are several apps that allow you to make a grocery list on your phone. Another tip is to put a grocery list on the refrigerator for family members to jot down items that need replacing. Milk, bread, peanut butter, etc. are common items.
- **Discounts, sales, and coupons.** You can save money with discounts and sales. Check grocery store ads and plan your meals around what is on sale that week. Coupons can help save money (there are plenty of websites). Keep in mind that coupons are only good if the item is something you plan to use. Check for restrictions including number of items that must be purchased to use the coupon.
- **Time to shop.** Choose the time you shop wisely. Avoid shopping when you know the store will be crowded. Eat before going grocery shopping so you will avoid putting items, not on your list, in the cart. Go by yourself, if possible, to allow you to concentrate on your list and find the best buy.
- **Convenience costs.** The most nutritious meals are located around the border of the grocery store. Fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products, meats and breads. Food located on the aisles are usually convenience foods, those foods that have some of the preparation done for you. They usually cost more than making the food from scratch and many times they are loaded with extras, fat, sugar and calories.
- **Unit pricing.** Compare apples to apples. Check the unit price located below most items to find the best cost. If the store does not provide that information, you can determine it by dividing the cost by the ounces to find cost per ounce or pound.

- **Compare forms.** Compare fresh to frozen to canned for the best buy. Consider the cost of food that has some of the preparation done for you. For example, cut up broccoli will cost more than a head of broccoli.
- **Be a seasonal shopper.** Now is the time to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. They are in season and will be at the best flavor and lower in cost than other times of the year. Don't forget to shop the local Farmers Market!
- **Nutrition counts.** Look for foods that are nutrient dense. This means they have more nutrients per serving. Spend your food budget on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat protein and dairy. Limit your purchase of high-fat and high-sugar foods. Dry beans, eggs, peanut butter are great alternative sources of protein and will cost less than cuts of meat.
- **Stock up to save.** Buying in bulk or larger quantities usually saves money. But not always. Know your prices before heading to the big box stores. Make sure you can use the larger quantities before they spoil or expire.
- **Avoid food waste.** Each year, over 108 billion pounds of food is wasted in the United States. Buy only what you can eat before it spoils or becomes outdated. Plan to use leftovers. Remember, most food items can be frozen to use at a later date.
- **Ask for discounts.** If you decide to eat out, ask for discounts. Many restaurants offer senior citizen and military discounts. They may not be much, but every penny counts.

For more information on saving money, developing a household budget, or other financial information, contact the Howard County Extension Service at 870-845-7517 or visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse. You can also check out our website at www.uada.edu for lots of free resources. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Information for this article was adapted from a training held this week with Extension Homemakers. If you would like to receive information on schedule programs, call the office to be added to our mailing list. A monthly newsletter is provided that lists most scheduled programs. Anyone can receive the newsletter.

Recipe of the Week

This recipe is low in cost and easy to make. Great idea for lunch that kids can make themselves with a little adult supervision. Use a toaster oven to avoid heating up the kitchen.

Taco Pizzas

1 can low-sodium, no-fat added refried beans

6 fajita size whole-wheat tortillas

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup reduced-fat shredded cheese

1 cup tomatoes; diced

1 cup corn (drained and rinsed if canned)

1 cup lettuce, shredded

Optional: add cooked leftover chicken or lean ground beef for more protein

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with aluminum foil or spray with non-stick cooking spray.

Spread $\frac{1}{4}$ cup refried beans on each tortilla. Lay tortillas on prepared baking sheets so they do not touch. Top with corn, tomatoes, and any other vegetables of your choice (such as diced onions or peppers).

Sprinkle each tortilla with 2 tablespoons of cheese. Bake 15-20 minutes, until hot and crisp. Cut into quarters, and top with lettuce.

Optional: Top with low-fat sour cream or salsa.

Nutrition Information per Pizza: 300 Calories, 7g Fat, 25g Protein, 43g Carbohydrate, 9g Fiber,
400mg Sodium