



GROCERY SHOPPING IN A RECESSION

Global recession has caused many consumer goods, particularly food items, to increase while wages and salaries have been stagnant. Although the current financial crisis may look somewhat bleak or depressing, families, especially those in which children are present, need to ensure that in addition to saving money, the health needs of all the family members are met. You may be wondering, how is it possible to stick to a budget while maintaining a health conscious diet? All is not lost. Even though prices are higher, healthy living does not have to be expensive. The wise shopper armed with a plan can still make healthful choices and save money. This issue of **Nyam News** will give you the tools to tailor-make a plan for you and your family.

Grocery shopping in a recession starts long before you reach the gates of your favourite grocery store or market. It starts at home. Just follow these simple steps to developing your shopping plan.

Take An Inventory

Start by taking an inventory of the foods you have at home in your food cupboards and refrigerator. Plan to use the foods that you already have as soon as possible, especially your perishables. "First in First out" is a good rule of thumb. This means that the oldest food items in stock should be used first. Make a note of the foods that you buy, but hardly use. If you don't like it, you probably won't eat it. Find those bottles and cans

hiding in the back that you forgot about.

Plan Your Menu

Once current stocks are accounted for, start your menu plan for the week. Menu planning saves you the hassle of deciding what to eat every day, as well as saves you money by making most efficient use of your food stocks. Remember to consider:

- What facilities are available for storing and preparing foods; how much food is eaten away from home; and how much money is budgeted for food.
- How best to serve as wide a variety of foods as possible. Try to include generous portions of fruits, vegetables and provisions

and smaller amounts of meats and other foods from animals and fats and oils. Legumes are a good substitute for meals if served with a cereal staple like rice, roti or dumplings.

- The multimix principle. This principle allows you to mix and match foods from the six food groups: Staples; Legumes and Nuts; Vegetables; Fruits; Foods from Animals; and Fats and Oils. A good multimix meal can be a one-pot meal of foods from at least three of the food groups. For example, soup with peas or meat, dumplings and vegetables; or it can be a meal with separate dishes such as rice, stewed chicken or peas and pumpkin. Bear in mind that each food group **DOES NOT** have to be represented at each meal. Try to meet your requirement throughout the day.
- It is not necessary to eat meat every day. You could plan to include vegetarian meals for a few days in the week. Remember that peas and beans combined with a cereal staple can provide protein quality as good as meat.
- Reducing fats, salts and sugary foods and snacks. Try to avoid processed foods that are usually high in fats, salts and sugars and use more peas, beans, fruits, vegetables, provision and whole grains. Other substitutions include using powdered milks instead of liquid and making your own fruit drinks instead of store bought sodas.

- Leftovers! Extra stewed chicken cooked on Sunday can be combined in a pelau / cook up or with vegetables later in the week. Left over vegetables might be added to soups or eaten for breakfast.
- Time available for cooking and available facilities. Even though some processed foods may be quicker to prepare, bear in mind that processing adds cost to the final product. Consider, for example: fresh or dried peas and beans versus canned; a whole chicken that needs to be prepped at home rather than the chicken parts in packages; and whole carrots versus baby carrots. Using foods closer to their natural state, can be more time consuming, but is often healthier and will result in cost savings.
- The fuel used for various cooking methods. You can conserve fuel and save money by cooking food as quickly as possible. Plan for stir fries, one-pot meals or where you can bake several things at once, or use the pressure cooker or microwave oven effectively. Note too, that lowering the flame and keeping the cover on pots helps food to cook more quickly.

Make Your List

- Once your menu is planned for the week it's time to make your grocery list. Carrying a grocery list helps to keep you focused and avoid impulse

buys. You need to be flexible, however, and take advantage of the deals you may discover once you get to the market or store. For example, if pumpkin is cheaper than carrots this week and you planned for carrots go ahead and make a switch. Remember to include amounts on your list. You should aim for quantities that will meet your needs for the week and can be stored adequately. Weekly shopping optimizes your shopping and reduces wastage.

At the list making stage it may also be worthwhile to consider and include on your list, where you are going to get what. Consider if it would be cheaper to shop for certain goods at the market versus the grocery store and, of course, not forgetting to consider the quality of goods on offer. Choice of grocery will also affect the price of goods. **DO** your homework! Determine which groceries have the best prices, but add the cost of transport to make sure that the cost savings are worth your while.

Heading Out

- So you have your list, you know where the bargains are and you are ready to go. Eat something! Never shop on an empty stomach, you are more likely to make impulse purchases and buy far more than you need. Walk with your

list and cash, if feasible. Shopping with cash forces you to stick to your budget and seek out the best bargains. Walk with your calculator so you can work your bargains out quickly and accurately.

At the Market

Markets have traditionally been the source for great bargains but a smart shopper can manage to squeeze even more savings out of market purchases. The following tips will help to guide you to do just that:

- Choose your shopping time wisely. Go early in the day. Some sellers give their first customers for the day bargain prices as good luck for the day's sales. Or you can go late in the day when sellers are likely to be packing up and are eager to sell the remaining stock quickly. The down side to the late shopping strategy, however, is that the better produce will be long gone when you get there. Select goods carefully. Choose only wholesome foods to avoid wastage through spoilage.
- Make sure you are getting the best possible produce for the price. Don't be afraid to bargain.
- Stock up when prices are low, but only for foods for

which you have adequate storage. Remember some foods may be bargains because they are near their expiry dates and they are likely to spoil within a few days. Only take up these bargains if you plan to eat the food right away!

- Buy fruits and vegetables in season.

At the Grocery Shop

An understanding of how grocery stores operate helps you to find the best value for your money. For example, did you know that products placed at eye level in the store are usually the ones with the highest profit margin for the store? For cheaper prices look a bit higher or lower.

- Know the layout of your grocery store. They scatter the essential items so that you have to walk through the entire store to get the basics. This way you are more likely to see and be tempted to buy additional things. High sugar and salty snacks are usually placed at the checkout counter. Try to avoid those. Ignore the free samples! They are there for a reason: to tempt you to buy foods you had not planned for.
- Try a cheaper brand than your usual. You may be pleasantly surprised that

the ingredients and quality are comparable to your usual brand. Often products packaged or made at the same factories are labelled and priced differently not because of a difference in quality, but a difference in advertising budget.

- Know how much of a product you need and buy accordingly. Buying a larger container may realistically save you more per unit but buying a pack of 6 when you only need two is no bargain. This is especially true in membership clubs that sell only large quantities. On the other hand, if you use a lot of a particular food item, but in small portions at a time, it's tempting to buy several of the tiny packs; but in this case you may be better served buying a large pack and portioning the contents yourself.
- Beware of sales and 2 for 1 specials on packaged goods. Groceries often use this tactic to rid themselves of foods close to their expiry date. It's no bargain if the food is likely to expire before you have had a chance to consume it. Also avoid dented misshaped cans, cans with missing labels and labels you cannot read. Selecting these can lead to possible food-borne diseases or the

consumption of foods with ingredients that could affect your health. They are not worth the risk. But you can find the true bargains if you know your labels. Foods labelled use by should be discarded once that date has passed, but foods labelled 'best before' can still be eaten once that date has passed but it will not be

optimum quality . Comparing date of manufacture with best before will give you an indication.

- Grocery shopping during a recession requires a bit more planning and effort than usual but healthful meals using a variety of foods are possible within a tight budget.

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