Eating Protein Foods on a Budget

My total is what?!? There has been a lot of sticker shock at the grocery store lately. Food prices in general have increased in the last couple of years, but meat prices have gotten a lot of attention lately. Foods from the Protein Foods Group (http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/protein-foods.html) are important sources of protein, iron, vitamins B and E, zinc and magnesium. Therefore, it’s necessary to determine how to fit them into your diet but stay within your food budget.

Here are four tips for including protein foods in your diet and staying within your budget:

1. **Use** [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/protein-foods.html) **to determine how much food you need from the Protein Foods Group.** The amount needed for the average person is 5-6 ounces. If you’re eating meat, this is just about the size of two decks of cards. Most Americans consume much more than this. By not eating larger portions than you need, you can stay within your food budget.

2. **Choose both animal and plant-based sources of protein.** As seen by this chart (https://iastate.app.box.com/s/gaorjn9xrrq1achlrskjh), the cost of a serving of protein varies by type. Some protein foods like hot dogs are inexpensive, but also higher in fat and sodium than other protein foods. By including a variety of protein sources in your diet, you can enjoy the kinds of protein you prefer but balance the cost. Be sure to consider nutritional value along with cost when choosing what sources of protein to eat.

3. **Watch for sales at the grocery store.** When meat your family enjoys is on sale, buy extra and put in your freezer for use at a later time.

4. **Choose recipes that help stretch protein foods.** For more expensive sources of protein, use them in recipes that make them go further. Soups, casseroles, stir-fry, and salads combine meat and poultry with beans, grains, vegetables, and dairy to make more servings.

Common sources of protein foods that I eat include ground beef, chicken breast, eggs, beans, peanut butter, and nuts. Here are some of the dishes I like to prepare with protein foods:

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GROUND BEEF:
Tacos
Homemade pizza
Chili
**Skillet Lasagna**
Serving Size: 1 cup  Serves: 8
Ingredients:
- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 1/2 onion, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or 1/4 teaspoons garlic powder
- 3 cups spaghetti or pasta sauce (26 to 28 ounces)
- 1 cup water
- 8 ounces wide noodles
- 1 (10-ounce) package chopped spinach, thawed
- 1 (12-ounce) container lowfat cottage cheese
- 1/2 cup (4 ounces) shredded mozzarella cheese
- Optional: fresh or canned, drained sliced mushrooms

Instructions:
1. Wash hands.
2. Cook ground beef, onions, and garlic together in a large skillet or electric fry pan; stir to prevent sticking. When ground beef has turned brown transfer mixture to a colander set over a bowl and rinse with hot water to remove grease. Return mixture to skillet.
3. Add spaghetti sauce and water to skillet and bring to a boil.
4. Add uncooked noodles, stir, cover with lid, turn down the heat, and cook 5 minutes.
5. Squeeze the thawed spinach with your clean hands to remove the juice and then stir into the pan. Add mushrooms if you like. Cover and simmer 5 minutes.
6. Spoon cottage cheese over the top. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese, put the lid on and let it heat another 5 to 10 minutes until heated through and noodles are tender.

Tips:
- This recipe tastes great as leftovers!

CHICKEN BREAST:
Quick Pad Thai
Chicken Fajitas
Chicken Enchiladas
**Mexican Chicken Soup**
Serving Size: 1 cup  Serves: 8  Cost Per Serving: $.82
Ingredients:
- 2 (15-ounce) cans diced tomatoes (Mexican-style)
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups frozen corn or 1 15-ounce can corn, drained and rinsed
- 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast
Instructions:
1. Add tomatoes, beans, corn, broth, garlic, chili powder, cumin (if desired), and pepper in large saucepan.
2. Remove and discard any visible fat from chicken. Cut chicken into large chunks and add to the saucepan. Heat to boiling, reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes, or until chicken is tender.
3. Remove the chicken and place on a plate; use forks to shred the chicken. Return the shredded chicken to soup.

Tips:
- Serve with choice of garnishes, such as chopped cilantro, sliced or chopped avocado, light sour cream, shredded cheese or baked tortilla chips.
- One cup dried beans (black, kidney, garbanzo) can be substituted for the canned, if desired. Rinse the beans and soak overnight before adding to the large saucepan.

EGGS:
Scrambled Egg Muffins
Breakfast Burritos
Egg Sandwich

BEANS:
Mexican Chicken Soup
Chili
Make Ahead Mexican Rollups

Ingredients:
- 3 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 15-ounce can beans (black, pinto, chili, etc.)
- 2 cups frozen corn or 1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn
- 2 cups shredded cheddar, Monterey jack, or hot pepper cheese (8 ounces)
- 1 cup salsa
- 8 10-inch or burrito-size tortillas

Instructions:
1. Wash hands.
2. Prepare rice according to package directions, allowing about 15 minutes for instant rice or about 45 minutes for regular brown rice. Cool completely.
3. Place beans in a colander or strainer, and rinse to reduce sodium. Transfer to a large bowl.
4. Thaw frozen corn in microwave; drain and add to bowl. Or, rinse and drain canned corn and add to bowl.
5. Stir in rice, cheese, and salsa.
6. Spoon about 1/2 cup filling on each tortilla. Roll or fold up.

Tips:
- Freeze this dish for future use: Wrap each in plastic wrap and place in pan in freezer overnight. When completely frozen, place in freezer weight plastic bag. Seal, label with date, and return to freezer. Roll-ups should keep 6 to 8 weeks in the freezer.
- To use: Thaw in the refrigerator before reheating. Microwave thawed tortillas in the plastic wrap for about 1 minute.
- For variety, serve this filling mixture on lettuce or spinach for a salad, or use as a dip.

According to MyPlate, I need 6 ounces of protein foods per day. If I eat an egg and cheese on an English muffin for breakfast, 2 servings (2 cups) of Mexican Chicken Soup for lunch, and a serving of Skillet Lasagna for supper, I will eat the 6 ounces of protein foods recommended for me. There will also be enough Mexican Chicken Soup and Skillet Lasagna for my family to eat

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and we will still have leftovers for another day.

Protein foods are necessary for good health. With some planning and some go-to recipes, you can eat your favorite protein foods and stick to your budget. Do you have a favorite trick for making meat go further? Share it on the Spend Smart. Eat Smart Facebook page.

Sloppy Joes

Whether you call them taverns, loose-meats, made-rites or sloppy joes, ground beef sautéed with chopped vegetables, seasonings and sauce served on a bun is a hit.

We called them Sloppy Joes when I was growing up and they were always a favorite. I know my mom hid some vegetables in them, as I do now with my grandson. Our recipe calls for onion, celery and green pepper but you can easily substitute diced or grated carrots. To reduce the sodium you can also substitute tomato sauce for the ketchup (this saves 420mg of sodium!)

To save time consider making a large batch and freezing it for a quick meal. Some families buy 10 pounds of ground beef at a time and make a basic mix like this one to freeze and use in various ways like spaghetti sauce, taco filling, etc.

The cost of beef is high this year. You can save money by buying ground beef with a higher percentage of fat if you are willing to rinse the ground beef as we have outlined in the steps below. Just be sure to collect the water with the ground beef fat in a bowl and refrigerate to harden fat. Spoon hardened fat into trash so you don’t clog your plumbing.

Sloppy Joes

Serving Size: 1/2 cup meat and one bun  Serves: 5

Ingredients:
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1/2 medium onion, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
- 1/2 cup celery, chopped (about 1 stalk of celery)
- 1/2 cup green or red pepper, chopped (about 1/2 large pepper)
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup tomato ketchup
- 1 tablespoon prepared mustard
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 5 whole wheat buns

Instructions:
1. Combine ground beef, onion, celery, and pepper in a medium skillet. Add water.
2. Cook over medium low heat for 15 minutes. Stir as needed. Cook until beef mixture reaches at least 160°F.
3. Put ground beef mixture in a colander. Pat mixture with paper towels and rinse with warm water to remove fat.
5. Toast buns, if desired, in an oven broiler, toaster oven, or skillet. To use a skillet, spread buns with margarine and place face side down in skillet. Cook over medium heat 1-2 minutes.

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