

# 8 Tips to Reduce Your Food Bill

Buying food is essential, but if you're not careful, it can also eat into your budget.

We've all given into the temptation of dinner at an expensive restaurant or a thoughtless trip to the grocery store where you throw anything and everything into the cart. Unfortunately, these expenses add up quickly and can cause your food budget to balloon into something unsustainable. If you've been wondering how to reduce your food bill, consider these 8 strategies.

## 1. Limit Eating Out

It's probably obvious, but takeout, that delicious ramen place, and even quick "cheap" burgers add up quickly. That's why hitting up your go-to restaurant less often is one of the most effective ways to lower your food budget. Of course this doesn't mean to stop eating out entirely. Restaurants are cultural, they're social—they're not the enemy. But, when it comes to your budget, they can turn into a bit of a black hole.

So how often should you eat out? It's up to you. The key is moderation and balance. If you can't stomach the idea of eating out less, know that you'll have to cut your budget in other categories. Just remember that eating out truly is one of the largest chunks of your food budget, so think critically and carefully about how much you're currently spending at restaurants and how much you want to be spending.

## 2. Plan Your Grocery Shopping

We've all been advised to create a grocery list and stick to it, but that's only one way to save money at the store. Coupons, even if the savings seem small (\$0.50 here, \$1 there), make a difference in the long run. Also, grocery stores often send out a weekly ad; take notice and plan your meals for the week around discounts. Finally, try buying staples that are affordable and versatile, things like bread, pasta, beans, and rice. You can use those things for a whole bunch of different meals and tailor them to your tastes.

## 3. Reduce Food Waste

Another full vegetable drawer ready for the garbage can? Wasting food is wasting money. Try canned or frozen produce instead! It lasts much longer and is just as good for you. Preservatives can be rinsed off canned foods and frozen is a-ok. Do your best to avoid spending money on food you won't eat, and remember that good intentions can often pave a road to rotten zucchini... and lettuce...and grapes.

## 4. Buy in Bulk

You can save money per package or ounce when you buy in bulk. It's a great strategy for foods you buy and eat often. Keep in mind, though, that buying more than you'll actually eat isn't saving you any money. Do you really need 15 pounds of onions? Plan how you'll use something you buy in bulk before taking it to the register.

## 5. Set a Food Budget

Buying food without a budget is like forgetting your umbrella in a downpour—a recipe for disaster. In order to create a budget, though, you'll need to know what's reasonable. To figure that out, track your spending. After a month or two, assess how much you're actually spending on food each week and then make a plan. Can you cut back? By how much? What's doable? Once you have a baseline, you can start making adjustments. Create a spending limit and stick to it!

## 6. Plan for Leftovers

Try making big meals a few times a week—meals that you couldn't possibly eat at once! Why? Leftovers! Leftovers are a great way to have ready-to-go meals and snacks that you don't have to spend a lot for. Of course, try not to waste food! But if you'll eat the leftovers, making them can stretch ingredients longer and get you more bang for your buck.

## 7. Meal Prep

Meal prep isn't just for the organized ones among us—no seriously, everyone can meal prep. If you plan your meals ahead of time (or better yet, prepare them), you'll be less likely to eat out when you're in a bind or pressed for time. If this seems overwhelming, start small. Try making lunch the night before or putting together a dedicated drawer for go-to snacks (ooh and new picks each week?). You can also go big and cook the ingredients for a week of meals ahead of time or create "freezer meals" that you can pop into a slow cooker or oven. Whatever works for you is the perfect place to begin, and every bit of planning matters.

## 8. Brew Your Own Coffee

A lot of Americans need that little bit of a pick-me-up each morning—that's fine! But recurring costs, like a daily latte, cause your money to disappear exponentially. Take coffee, for example. An average cup of coffee costs around \$3. While that isn't much on its own, a full month of 31 cups will cost you roughly \$93. Meanwhile, a 12oz bag of coffee beans costs about \$10 and gets you around 12 cups of coffee. That would mean you're spending about \$0.83 per cup, or just under \$26 for a whole month. That's a lot of savings over multiple months or years! If you need it, buy the extra cream or fancy toppings, too. It'll still save you money in the long run.

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