

9 Nutritious, Low-Cost Foods That Dieticians Love

Healthy foods don't have to be expensive. Here are nutrient-packed foods that won't empty your wallet.

By Emcara Health Editors

Many people who need to save money on food end up buying cheap and unhealthy items when they go grocery shopping. They ignore the outer areas of the store—where fresh and healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and raw meats are located—and instead choose processed foods in the middle of the store. Foods that come from a box may be cheaper, but they often lack important nutrients and contain unhealthy amounts of salt, fat, and preservatives.

There's a better way. Nutritious foods are everywhere in the supermarket if you know where to look. Emcara Health healthcare providers can help you learn about foods that are good for you and don't cost a lot of money. They can also teach you how to use low-cost ingredients to create tasty and nutritious meals.

To find out which foods are both healthy and affordable, we asked three dieticians for their recommendations. Here are

nine foods they suggest you add to your shopping list.

Budget-Friendly Food #1: Canned Beans

Canned beans, such as pinto, black, or kidney, are low cost and great sources of protein and fiber. Dietician [Elizabeth Friedrich](#), MPH, RD, likes them because you can easily add them to soups, stews, casseroles, and salads.

Canned beans don't form a complete protein by themselves, but you can combine them with a grain like brown rice to create one, says Friedrich. Talk to your Emcara Health provider about other complete vegetable protein combinations, which are almost always cheaper than animal sources.

Budget-Friendly Food #2: Milk and Yogurt

Dairy products are among the most nutritious animal-based foods. They're often some of the cheapest, too.

Whole milk contains more protein per dollar than chicken breast, for instance, and has a lot of important nutrients like calcium and vitamin D. A cup of yogurt may also satisfy your protein and fat needs for a meal, particularly when paired with a grain like granola, and a glass of whole milk is easy to add to any meal.

"What I really love about dairy products is you can eat them

at any time of day," says [Kristen Simonds](#), MScFN, RD.

Budget-Friendly Food #3: Canned or Frozen Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are a key part of any healthy diet, providing fiber and a level of nutrients not found in any other food group. However, fresh produce can be costly, leading many Americans to turn to less healthy processed options.

Instead, dietitians like Friedrich endorse canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, which are also nutritious and usually much less expensive.

If you're worried about taste and texture, your Emcara Health provider can show you how to include canned and frozen produce in appetizing meals, such as frozen-fruit smoothies and canned vegetable soups.

Budget-Friendly Food #4: Starchy Vegetables

Potatoes are energy-dense, rich in antioxidants and other nutrients like potassium, and high in fiber. In the United States, they're also abundant and cheap. You need not limit yourself to russet, sweet, white, red, purple, or fingerling potatoes, either.

"Starchy vegetables and grains—rice, farro, wheat berries, peas and beans—also have a lot of fiber," says [Nancy](#)

[Mazarin](#), MS, RDN. "That's what we feed our microbiome with."

Budget-Friendly Food #5: Canned Tuna

Canned tuna is one of the cheapest sources of complete protein, but its benefits don't stop there. In addition to containing 8 grams of protein per ounce—roughly the same as chicken breast—it's rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help preserve joint, brain, and eye health as we age.

To maximize your omega-3 intake, look for tuna canned in water rather than oil.

Budget-Friendly Food #6: Lentils

Lentils and other legumes like chickpeas are packed with fiber, carbohydrates, calcium, and essential amino acids. They also count as starchy vegetables, helping to regulate blood sugar and lower blood pressure and bad cholesterol levels.

Talk to an Emcara Health provider about ways to integrate healthy, cheap legumes like lentils and chickpeas into your diet through soups, salads, casseroles, and other tasty dishes.

Budget-Friendly Food #7: Eggs

They may have gone up in price recently, but a carton of eggs is still a relatively cheap source of protein and vitamins D and B12, among other key vitamins and minerals

“Eggs are one of the best sources of protein, period,” Mazarin says. “Everything is measured against them.”

Eggs can also help increase levels of good cholesterol (HDL) without increasing your risk of heart disease from bad cholesterol (LDL), says Mazarin.

Budget-Friendly Food #8: Poultry

Chicken, another complete animal protein, contains all the key amino acids your body can't make on its own. Per gram of protein, it's not quite as cheap as some plant sources or whole milk, but it's among the least expensive meat-based protein sources you'll find at the grocery store.

Budget-Friendly Food #9: Multivitamins

Dieticians typically don't suggest multivitamins as a replacement for healthy, whole foods. However, they can be a useful and cost-effective way of helping you satisfy your nutritional needs when whole foods don't quite get you there.

“I look at a multivitamin supplement as an insurance formula,” Mazarin says. “A nice multivitamin has calcium,

vitamin D, and magnesium—which is really important for preventing cardiovascular disease and hypertension."

Talk to your Emcara Health provider before starting on a multivitamin to avoid getting too much of any one nutrient.

To learn more about Emcara Health, call 1-800-728-0901 from 9 am to 7 pm Monday to Friday.