

Grocery shopping and five cheap meals

Easy · 20 min to plan; 30 to 60 min to shop · \$1.67 to \$3.09 a serving for the five meals; USDA's thrifty plan is about \$58.50 to \$73.60 a week for one adult, before the one-person adjustment

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A list (paper or your phone)
- ☐ Your phone calculator for unit prices
- ☐ A few reusable bags
- ☐ About 20 minutes before you go

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Know your number.** USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, its estimate of a healthy diet with every meal cooked at home, costs \$58.50 a week for a woman 20 to 50 and \$73.60 for a man 20 to 50, as of August 2026.
- 2 **Plan before you shop.** Iowa State's Spend Smart.
- 3 **Write the list by store section (produce, cans and dry goods, dairy, frozen, meat) so you walk the store once.** Buy what's on the list.
- 4 **Compare unit prices, not package prices.** The unit price is the price per ounce, pound or count, and it's usually on the shelf tag.
- 5 **Do the math yourself when there's no tag: price divided by size.** For cereal, divide the price by the servings on the Nutrition Facts label.
- 6 **Compare forms too: fresh, frozen and canned.** In the same example, canned green beans cost \$0.06 an ounce, frozen \$0.08 and fresh \$0.13.
- 7 **Watch for shrinkflation: the same price for a smaller package.** NIST says unit pricing is the best tool a shopper has for catching it.
- 8 **Shop food safety in order.** Bag raw meat separately, and store it at home in containers or sealed, leakproof bags.
- 9 **Cook the five meals below in an order that uses up the fresh stuff first: the roasted vegetables and egg skillet early in the week, the beans, rice, potatoes and frozen corn later.**
- 10 **Cook once, eat twice.** Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days or freeze them, and reheat them to 165°F.

Watch out Cheap isn't cheap if it spoils. Buying the big bag only saves money if you eat it. And thaw frozen meat in the fridge, in cold water or in the microwave, never on the counter. A pound of ground meat or chicken takes a full day in the fridge, so move it down the night before.

DAD NOTE Shop on a full stomach, with a list, and look at the little price-per-ounce number on the shelf tag. That number doesn't lie.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/your-place/cooking-on-a-budget/grocery-shopping-and-five-cheap-meals/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Iowa State University Extension and Outreach; National Institute of Standards and Technology; FoodSafety.gov.