

# Vegetarian Meal Planning



As a vegetarian, you might find it tricky to eat healthy and stay within a budget. The good news is that with a little planning, you can save money and eat well-balanced vegetarian meals that provide enough protein, calcium, iron, and other nutrients. Here are some budget-friendly tips, plus meal and snack ideas that won't break the bank.

## Money-Saving Tips

- **Plan meals.** Take time each week to plan weekly menus and write out a shopping list.
- **Buy in bulk.** Choose large packages of foods with long shelf lives, like whole grain pasta, brown rice, whole grain cereals and flour, dried fruit, nuts, beans, peas, and lentils. If a large package is too much food, split it with another family.
- **Buy local.** Locate and visit your local farmers' markets. Some accept SNAP and Food Stamps.
- **Eat seasonally.** Fruits and vegetables that are in season tend to cost less.
- **Grow your own.** Herbs are easy to grow and do not take up much space. For larger gardens, try tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, carrots, and radishes.
- **Preserve produce.** Freeze or can fruits and vegetables when they are in season and at their cheapest.
- **Shop sales.** Check local store ads for sales on staples like beans and rice. If you like shopping on the Web, remember that online grocers also have sales.
- **Choose store brands.** They tend to be much cheaper than name brands.
- **Cook and freeze.** Cook double or triple batches of soups, stews, casseroles, sauces, and baked goods, and freeze some for later.

## Breakfast Ideas

- Top low-fat, fat-free, or soy yogurt with seasonal fruit and chopped nuts.
- Mix oatmeal with fresh fruit and chopped nuts.
- Serve whole grain cereal with fat-free or low-fat milk and fresh, seasonal fruit. If you don't drink cow's milk, use rice, soy, or almond milk instead. Look for sales on these milk alternatives.
- Toast whole wheat bread and top with peanut butter and jam or cottage cheese.
- Make a smoothie by blending fresh seasonal fruit or frozen fruit with low-fat or fat-free milk, a milk alternative, or low-fat yogurt.

### Lunch and Dinner Ideas



- Make a pot of soup with leftover vegetables, potatoes, beans, or lentils.
- Use whole wheat or corn tortillas to make burritos stuffed with rice, beans, low-fat cheese and seasonal vegetables.
- Stir-fry vegetables and tofu and serve over brown rice or noodles.
- Top whole grain pasta with homemade tomato sauce, low-fat cheese, and seasonal vegetables.
- Make a sandwich of hummus, whole wheat pita bread, and with raw or grilled vegetables.

### Snack Ideas

- Top a baked potato or sweet potato with salsa, baked beans, or chili.
- Air pop a batch of popcorn. (See recipe.)
- Spread peanut butter or hummus on raw vegetables.
- Make your own trail mix with nuts, whole grain cereal, and dried fruit.
- Build a fruit parfait with layers of low-fat, fat-free, or soy yogurt and seasonal fruit; sprinkle with chopped nuts.

#### Easy Air-Popped Popcorn

Place  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup unpopped popcorn kernels in a brown paper lunch bag. Tightly fold over the top of the bag several times. Microwave on high for about 2 minutes, or until the popping slows. Enjoy the popcorn plain, or add a sprinkle of salt.

