

## Cooking on a Budget

Is your budget stretched like a rubber band these days? Make nutritious, delicious, and affordable meals following these simple tips.

**Plan your meals:** Make a grocery list. To save money and eat healthy, planning is most essential. You will be organized, have the right ingredients on-hand, and have meals you look forward to eating.

**Check your inventory:** Scan your fridge and pantry before you leave the house. There may be food you may have forgotten.

**Stick to your list when grocery shopping:** It is easy to get sidetracked which often leads to unintended, expensive purchases.

**Pantry powerhouses are your friend:** With a shelf life of up to five years, canned foods are excellent staples. They are packed at the peak of freshness, heated to prevent spoiling and airtight sealed against foodborne illness and contamination.

**Frozen vegetables, fruits, meat, and poultry are a life saver:** They have a long shelf life and nutrient losses are minimal because of the quick method of processing.

**Buy store and generic brands:** All manufacturers follow guidelines to provide safe food. Some are the same quality as national brands.

**Look for sales:** Stock up on items you frequently use.

**Replace meat occasionally with meatless options:** Choosing eggs, legumes like beans and lentils and other protein sources can save money.

**Cook more at home:** Eating out can drain your budget quickly. Some people enjoy cooking every day and some prefer batch cooking on the weekends.

**Cook larger portions and use leftovers:** Leftovers are great for lunches or frozen for future meals. You can also repurpose the ingredients to make soups, stews, stir-fries, and salads.

Learn some quick starter recipes like [Pronto Taco Soup](#) and [Easy Frozen Veggie Stir-Fry](#).



## Pronto Taco Soup

### Ingredients:

1 lb. ground turkey or lean ground beef  
1 large onion, diced  
1, 15 oz. can whole kernel corn, not drained  
2, 14.5 oz. cans chopped tomatoes, not drained  
1, 14.5 oz. can hominy, not drained  
1, 15 oz. can pinto beans, not drained  
1 package dry taco seasoning mix  
1 package dry ranch salad dressing mix  
1, 32 oz. container chicken broth  
¼ cup water, if needed

**Instructions:** Brown turkey in a soup pot until cooked. Add onions and sauté until transparent. Add remaining ingredients and simmer 20 minutes. The soup is ready to serve or freeze remaining servings for future use.

**Variation:** If you are concerned about the sodium content, use low sodium or no added salt canned vegetables and broth, low sodium taco seasoning and half the amount of the dry mix packets.

Yield: 12 1-cup servings

Source: Kathy Duran-Thal, RDN, LD

## Easy Frozen Veggie Stir-Fry

### Ingredients:

2 Tbsp. reduced sodium soy sauce  
½ Tbsp. brown sugar  
2 tsp. garlic powder  
2 tsp. peanut butter  
1, Tbsp. canola or peanut oil  
1, 16 oz. package frozen mixed vegetables  
1, 8 oz. package frozen brown rice

**Instructions:** Combine the soy sauce, brown sugar, garlic powder and peanut butter in a small bowl. Heat oil in a large skillet or wok over medium heat; stir frozen veggies and rice until just tender for 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from heat and fold in soy sauce mixture.

Yield: 6 servings

Source: adapted from [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com)

**Boost your fitness plan with a Nutrition Consultation with Cindy Kleckner, RDN, LD, FAND,** registered dietitian nutritionist and culinary expert at the Apex Centre. Email Cindy at [fitness@mckinneytexas.org](mailto:fitness@mckinneytexas.org).