

Reduce Your Grocery Costs Over the Holidays

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The Cost of Healthy Eating is Increasing!

Tight for time and money? If so, you are not alone. The cost of food is increasing in our community. An annual survey completed in local grocery stores shows that there has been an overall trend of increased food costs in the Kenora, Rainy-River Districts. According to the most recent survey results, the average cost of feeding a family of four is \$722.63 per month. This is a substantial hike of \$145.35 per month since the survey was first completed in 1998.

Shrinking Food Budget

The holidays can be a difficult time when it comes to budgeting, especially food budgeting. On top of the monthly bills that *must* be paid, the holidays bring with them extra expenses such as gifts for family and friends, social functions and increased travel costs. This can leave little money left over to buy food. If families are not able to buy enough healthy food, they may become run down, sick and unable to care for themselves.

Cut Your Food Costs

The holidays are a time to celebrate with family and friends and eating is one of the many pleasures of the season. So how do you enjoy your favourite holiday foods and still stay within your food budget? Try these changes to cut down costs:

- Use apple juice or chicken stock instead of wine or sherry (for sauces).
- For holiday meals that include vegetables, use any vegetables you have on hand. If the recipe calls for something that is too “exotic” or expensive, simply use what you have and what you like. Frozen veggies are often cheaper and work just as well.
- Cut down on desserts. Holiday baking and treats tend to cost a lot and are not the healthiest option. Choose one or two of your families favourite holiday treats instead of packing the freezer full of sweets.
- If some of your holiday recipes call for homogenized milk or cream but you do not have it in the house, use whatever milk you have. The only difference will be the fat content.
- Use dried herbs such as garlic powder and sage on your turkey and in your dressing instead of buying fresh herbs.
- Try plain yogurt in place of sour cream.
- Make your own cracker crumbs rather than pre-made bread crumbs.
- Use white sugar instead of brown sugar.
- Replace 1 cup of butter milk with 1 cup of milk + 1 tbsp. vinegar or lemon juice.

Stretch Your Food Dollar

If you find that the holidays are leaving you with less money for groceries the following tips can help you stick to a tight grocery budget.

- Plan a menu and make a grocery list. Plan some traditional holiday meals and snacks in advance and include items that you do not have on hand in a grocery list. Use some of the tips and ingredient substitutions listed above to keep costs down. The grocery list will help you to avoid buying food on impulse.
- Shop after you have eaten. A hungry shopper will often buy things on impulse. Try getting to the store when it is not busy to avoid the holiday crowd, and allow yourself enough time to shop at a relaxed pace.
- Shop the outer aisles of the grocery store. These foods are usually less expensive and are often healthier than foods such as cookies and candy that are found in the inner aisles.
- Select foods from higher or lower shelves. Often the brands that are easy to see and reach are more expensive. Choosing “no name” or store brands can also help keep costs down as they are usually cheaper and taste as good or better than “brand name” products.
- Limit the use of prepared traditional favourites. “Ready-to-go” foods are usually less healthy and cost more because they have been prepared by someone else. Buy the ingredients (choosing lower cost substitutions) and prepare the foods yourself.

With a few simple changes in the way you shop, you can get more food within your grocery budget and enjoy some of your favourite holiday recipes at a lower cost.

Finally, remember what the holidays are all about! There are many holiday activities that do not require food or money. Get out and play. Take the family tobogganing or go for a relaxing cross-country ski. Create a scavenger hunt or play a board game. Make the best of your family time together.

If you would like more information on stretching your food dollar, cutting the cost of cooking or community programs that are available to help with your limited food budget over or after the holidays, contact the Northwestern Health Unit.