

We can't argue the fact that it's cheaper to eat fast food than to craft your own healthy dish by hand... but then again, being tired, run-down, sick, and overweight is pretty "expensive" too, when it comes to your quality of life. (Then *again*, we don't need to argue for all of the reasons you should eat better, because if you've read [It Starts With Food](#), you're already sold!) It's important to make healthy eating a top financial priority, but there are plenty of ways you can stretch your current food budget, too.

priority #1: protein

Hit the meat, fish, and eggs section first, as the majority of your budget should be spent on high quality animal protein sources.

- Best choice: Look for grass-finished or grass-fed, pastured, organic and wild-caught. Buy whatever's available, and learn how to cook it, if necessary. If you have room in your budget, buy extra and freeze it for later. Hit the dairy case for organic, pastured eggs - even at \$5 a dozen, they're still one of the cheapest sources of protein.
- Good choice: If you just can't afford grass-fed or pastured meat, go for ruminant animals (beef, lamb, goat, elk, bison, venison), fish and eggs first; chicken and pork second. Buy the leanest cuts available and trim all the fat (or skin) before eating.
- Avoid: Bypass all commercially-raised processed meats (like bacon, sausage and deli meats).

priority #2: produce

Next, wander over to produce section (and the freezer, for economical options). Remember, high-quality protein sources are of a higher health priority than organic fruit and vegetables. Pesticides aren't great, but the downsides of factory farmed meat are worse.

- Vegetables: Load up on veggies before heading to the fruit section. Go for local and seasonal whenever possible, as these are going to be the least expensive and most nutritious. Choose nutrient dense veggies more often. Use the Environmental Working Group's "Clean Fifteen" and "Dirty Dozen" lists to help you determine whether to buy organic or not (<http://ewg.org>), or use this simple rule - if you peel it before eating (or don't eat the skin), organic isn't as important. Frozen vegetables can also be a budget-friendly option.
- Fruits: Buy what you can locally (and organically, if possible). If you can't get it locally then it's probably not in season, which means it's not as fresh, not as tasty, and more expensive. Frozen fruits (like berries) are inexpensive alternatives.

priority #3: healthy fats

Healthy fats are the last stop in your shopping. Buy less expensive fats (which are also, coincidentally, some of the healthiest) for your everyday meals, and stock up on oils, nuts, and seeds when you can.

- Bang for your buck: Some of the best sources of fat are also the least expensive. Canned coconut milk costs about \$2.00 and provides a whopping 72 grams of fat per can! Avocados are a year-round option, and generally inexpensive.
- Stock up: When there's a little extra room in your grocery budget, stock up on coconut oil, olive oil, and organic, pastured butter or ghee. These items are a little pricier, but a little goes a long way and they will last you quite a while.
- Don't go nuts: Beware the temptation to use nuts, seeds, and nut butters as a primary fat source, as they're not your healthiest option, and they tend to be pricey. This is another place where it's essential to read your labels. Many of the lower priced nuts are roasted in seed or vegetable oils - a less healthy option - so always go for the raw or dry roasted choice.