

5 Easy Ways to Save Money on Food

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Teresa Meek, January 2017

After a long day at work, it's always tempting to just put your feet up and order takeout for dinner. But if you stop to consider all the ways you can save money on food by avoiding extra meals out, it should bring you back to your feet in a hurry. The fact is, you're paying premium prices for those takeout orders. According to the [United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA), restaurant prices have gone up, but prices at the grocery store are actually going down. So it pays to find ways to save money on food by eating at home.

1. Set a Weekly Budget

You should set a weekly budget and stick to it. Keeping track of how much you're spending on food each week will help you set realistic goals and save money. While you're in the store, grab a flyer to make sure you don't miss weekly specials, and take advantage of coupons and rebate apps like [Ibotta](#) or [Checkout 51](#). Free apps like these tell you about cash back offers in your area and make it easy for you to apply the savings.

2. Cook Your Own Meals

According to [ABC News](#), two-thirds of people think they spend too much money on food. Oftentimes, they simply think they don't have the time to cook a balanced meal. But ABC put this time complaint to the test by sending a man to a drive-through restaurant while his wife and a chef cooked rice and fish at home. The result? The wife had dinner ready nine minutes earlier and spent almost half the amount as the husband.

3. Use Leftovers

You wouldn't dream of throwing money away, but that's exactly what you're doing every time you throw out food. Leftover meat, like chicken or turkey, can become the basis for a delicious homemade soup or a hearty sandwich for tomorrow's lunch. Rice can be turned into rice pudding or fried rice, and leftover veggies make healthy smoothies or a satisfying stir-fry.

4. Stick to a Grocery List

Grocery stores almost always place essentials like dairy products or produce at opposite ends of the building. You have to pass through the inner aisles to get from one to the other, increasing the odds that you'll purchase something on impulse. Go armed with a list and only visit the aisles you need. Once there, seek out brands on shelves above and below eye level for

the best deals. Don't be afraid of store brands, as they often have the same ingredients as brand names, and be mindful of those goodies strategically placed next to the checkout line – they're placed there for a reason.

5. Grow Your Own Food

Growing vegetables doesn't have to be a hassle, and it costs practically nothing. You don't even need space in your yard – some people are planting small curbside gardens in median strips or using window planters. In many areas, these small plots absorb enough rainwater that you don't even need a hose.

Additionally, if you have the space (and the inclination to embrace your inner farmer), consider building your own chicken coop, which will provide you with organic, fresh eggs all year-round – just be sure to check with your local government about rules and prepare yourself for a life that starts before dawn every day before you get started.

There are dozens of smart, creative ways to save money on food. Once you get started, new ideas will keep popping up. Your piggybank will fill up as your cravings for takeout fade away.

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