

Cooking healthy family meals on a budget.

BY CARON MILHAM Consulting Dietitian and Best selling Author of the *Australian Healthy Shopping Guide* and the *Australian Healthy Cooking Guide*.

It all starts in the supermarket. What you buy is what you cook. With time poor, busy lives, many families are looking for easy answers to create tasty yet healthy meals within their food budget.

Below are some tips to help save you money and time in the supermarket and kitchen without short-changing your health!

1. **Do a monthly pantry check** to review your supplies. This will help reduce repetitious buying, forgetting things and using items past their *use by date*.
2. **Check your fridge weekly** before you shop and use up half eaten packets and left over's or throw them out.
3. **Plan ahead.** Before you go shopping plan your meals then make a shopping list.
4. **Consider recipe re-invention.** Use left over fridge and pantry contents and add any new ingredients required to your shopping list to make a 'left overs recipe.'
5. **Go shopping with a satisfied stomach.** It will be easier to resist the temptation of those less healthy and more expensive goodies.
6. **Let your fingers do the shopping.** If you struggle to resist temptation in the shop, order over the internet or phone.
7. **Buy seasonal** fruit and veg, they're generally cheaper.
8. **Beware of specials.** Many well-intentioned people convince themselves they are trying to save when they buy treats on special. Go for bargains only if they're healthy items you can store, such as canned tomatoes or beans. If the offer is for a bulk pack of fruit split it with a friend or if its meat, invest in a freezer and store for later.
9. **Prevent wastage** especially of perishables like fresh fruit and veg. Buy smaller quantities or buy them frozen.
10. **Hunt down bargains.** Often in supermarkets more expensive items are at eye level, so check above and below for cheaper alternatives.
11. **Score bargains** by knowing your supermarkets patterns with markdowns of perishables. Meat, bread, and cooked chickens are often marked down at the end of the day or week and particularly just before a long weekend.
12. **Shop in quiet times** to examine healthiest and most economical choices.
13. **Shop like a racehorse with blinkers on.** Choose your checkouts and only go down the aisles you need and know which checkouts have magazines rather than chocolate to look at while you're waiting.
14. **Watch the wrapping!** Food is packaged to look either more appealing and, or healthier on the shelves and it's the processed foods, high in sugar and fat that seem to shine the brightest. Not only do these tend to be more expensive, they are generally less healthy, so best kept to a minimum.
15. **Use Mind power, not willpower.** Don't shop when you're tired or stressed, you're more likely to stock up on comfort foods. If possible, reschedule.

16. **Go it alone.** If you have kids, leave them home occasionally.
17. **Buy generic** or ‘homebrand’ options and save up to 20% off your shopping bill.
18. **Be the master of re-invention.** A white sauce for a cauliflower cheese sauce yesterday can become a cheese sauce for a lasagne today and then tomorrow with tuna, corn and peas turns into tuna mornay.
19. **Buy in bulk then do Marathon cook ups** to save time, money and sanity, then freeze for later. Soups, casseroles, spaghetti sauce, curries and patties generally freeze well.
20. **Consider healthy game meats.** To get started try kangaroo mince instead of beef in a spaghetti sauce.
21. **Make your own lunch** instead of buying it and save time by preparing and freezing sandwiches on weekends to avoid the morning rush.
22. **Grow herbs** in your own planter – always there, healthier and cheaper.
23. **Invest in a crock-pot** to be able to slow cook casseroles during the day. (This way cheaper but tougher meat can become tender.)
24. **Use legumes or beans** instead of meat to create a few ‘meat free’ meals each week and to ‘extend’ meat dishes.

*For more nutrition, shopping, cooking and weight loss tips and information on Caron’s services and books, visit: **www.healthy-guide.com***

The Australian Healthy Cooking Guide, the Australian Healthy Shopping Guide and consultations with Caron are available at all good bookstores and at SPORTSMED. S A – Blackwood and Goodwood. Ph: 8178 0399