

The Basic Shelf: Planning Meals on a Budget

Tasty and healthy meals can be enjoyed even if you are living on a tight budget! It's easy to fill up on grocery store bargains, but if the food is low in fibre, protein, or vitamins and minerals it's not good for you or your diabetes. People with diabetes need to have a balance of foods from all of the food groups to meet their nutritional needs. Eating healthy portions allows you to control your blood glucose level. The amount of fat, fibre, sodium (salt) as well as vitamins and minerals also affects your heart health.

When planning your basic shelf (foods to have on hand) keep in mind you can build this shelf of products over time. Consider the space you have and how you can store the foods to prevent spoilage and keep out insects and other pests. If your kitchen is not big enough, you can keep a box of well-sealed containers in the closet or under a bed. Keep a list of foods you have handy, so you can plan meals. When you use them, put what you need to replace on your shopping list to keep the shelf stocked. Don't buy foods you know you will not use.

Check out the ideas below for basics supplies to stock your pantry. These items will make it possible to plan healthy meals if you're storm-bound, if you're not able to get out and shop for fresh food, or even at the end of the month.

The Basic Shelf

Grains & Starches	hot cereal (not instant)
	cold cereal that's high in fibre (look for 4 g or more per serving)
	whole wheat and white flour
	white or brown rice (converted, not instant)
	regular or whole grain pasta (plain shapes are less costly)
Fruits & Vegetables	canned fruit in its own juice
	plain frozen fruit
	canned vegetables, like canned tomatoes (if they contain salt, you can rinse them off with cold water before cooking)
	plain frozen vegetables
	dried vegetable mixes
	dried soup mixes and boxes of soup (lower salt variety)
Meat & Alternatives	canned fish or poultry (packed in water)
	canned legumes, lentils and beans (e.g. chick peas and black, kidney or pinto beans)
	dried beans and legumes
	textured vegetable protein (TVP)
	peanut butter
	cartons of liquid egg (keep frozen)

Milk & Alternatives	skim milk powder
	evaporated skim, 1 or 2% milk
Fats*	canola oil
	soft non-hydrogenated margarines
	nuts (plain, not roasted or salted)

*Eat in small amounts, as they are high in calories.

Cost-saving tips

- Make a shopping list using the specials of the week.
- Choose store brands, or buy from the bulk bins. These are just as nutritious as name brands.
- Avoid buying processed mixes for rice or noodles; they are usually high in salt/sodium and more expensive than the plain variety.
- Plan to buy dry items you use often when they are on sale, such as pasta.
- Buy “day old” whole grain bread at the end of the day. Bread can be frozen for up to 3 months.
- Cereals that you cook yourself have more nutritional value and cost less than instant packages.
- Buy fruits and vegetables in season. Any extras can be frozen. Buy canned fruit in juice, not syrup. Limit fruit juices.
- Eat coleslaw more often as cabbage is cheaper than lettuce and just as good for you.
- Buy a block of part-skimmed cheese and grate it yourself. Any extra can be frozen and used at a later date.
- Buy yogourt in a larger tub.
- Cuts of meat from the shoulder or chuck are less expensive and they make great stews or pot roasts.
- Buy a whole chicken, cut it into pieces and remove the skin.
- Compare food labels for fat, sodium, carbohydrate and fibre.
- Check out community resources at your local public health unit (e.g. community gardens, community kitchens, food banks).



Tips for meal preparation

- Meat and poultry are the most costly items of the meal – serve a portion the size the palm of your hand (see *The Handy Portion Guide* on page 93), fill half of your plate with vegetables, and the remaining portion of the plate with whole grain rice, pasta, or potato.
- Use soy protein products to expand your meal options.
- Add grated carrot, finely chopped celery, or grated raw beets to ground meat to make it go further. Use leftover rice, dried breadcrumbs, oatmeal, buckwheat, or ground flaxseed to bind it together.
- Make a stock with meat bones. Add a little vinegar to the water so that some of the calcium from the bones will go into the stock.
- Canned soups: dilute the sodium by using 2 cans of water and adding 1 can of leftover or frozen vegetables. This should make 4 servings, each with more fibre and less sodium.
- Potatoes and cauliflower can be mashed together for a mashed potato dish that has less carbohydrate, more fibre and a nice flavor. Season with low-fat milk, herbs, and pepper.
- Add vegetables to sandwiches, stir-fries, omelettes, or scrambled eggs.

Soups for every occasion

When you cook vegetables, save all the vegetable water and use as a stock to make a nutritious soup. Cool the vegetable water and store it in a glass jar in the fridge. You can begin a soup by sautéing the flavouring ingredients (onion, garlic and some herbs) until they sweat. Add the stock and other soup ingredients such as celery, carrots and potatoes. Another way to make soup is to cook the vegetables in the stock with seasonings and simmer until they are tender.

Bouillon cubes are helpful in providing flavour. Choose low-sodium cubes or use half of a regular cube. If you choose to add tomatoes, add them after the vegetables have started to cook, otherwise the tomato will toughen the vegetables and require a longer cooking time.

Additions of pot barley, wild or brown rice, lentils or split peas add carbohydrates, fibre, protein and minerals.

To prevent milk in creamed soups from curdling, add the starch first before adding the milk. Thicken creamed soups by adding a mixture of flour and water [2 Tbsp (30 mL) of flour in ½ cup (125 mL) water well blended]. Add low-fat evaporated milk. The starch in the flour will prevent the milk from curdling. This is very important when you are making homemade tomato soup.

Tomato sauce can be made by sautéing some onion and garlic with herbs such as oregano, basil and dried parsley in a little oil for a few minutes to bring out the flavours. Add diced canned tomatoes, and simmer slowly to develop flavours. Cook slowly over low heat covered for at least a half an hour or longer. To

thicken, add a tablespoon or more of tomato paste. Season the sauce to your taste with a small amount of herbs and pepper. A pinch of cinnamon or grated carrots may be added during cooking for a sweeter tasting sauce.

Black Bean and Corn Soup

Makes 6 x 1½ cup servings

1 Tbsp (15 mL) olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves of garlic, minced
2 green bell peppers, diced
1 large stalk of celery, diced
1 tsp (5 mL) dried oregano leaves
1 tsp (5 mL) ground cumin
½ tsp (2 mL) dried thyme leaves
pinch cayenne pepper
4 cups (1 L) reduced sodium chicken or vegetable broth
1 can (19 oz/540 mL) tomatoes, chopped including juice
1 can (19 oz/540 mL) black beans, drained and rinsed
1 cup (250 mL) corn kernels (frozen, canned, or fresh)
¼ cup (60 mL) chopped fresh cilantro or parsley

1. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, green pepper, celery, oregano, cumin, thyme, and cayenne pepper; cook, stirring for 5 minutes or until vegetables are softened.
2. Add broth and tomatoes with juice; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes.
3. Stir in beans and corn. Cook 5 minutes more, or until vegetables are tender. Stir in cilantro or parsley; ladle into warm bowls.

Nutrients per serving:

Calories	158 kcal
Carbohydrate	26 g
Fibre	7 g
Protein	8 g
Fat	3 g
Sodium	680 g

Available carbohydrate: 19 g

Choices per serving: 1 Carbohydrate, 1 Meat & Alternative

Recipe reprinted with permission from *Diabetes Comfort Food* by Johanna Burkhard, Robert Rose Inc., 2006.

Cooking with legumes for nutrition, economy and taste

The fibre in legumes (dried beans or peas) helps to lower blood glucose and cholesterol levels and will make you feel fuller. Legumes are a good source of protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. Add legumes to other dishes and use them to extend meat dishes. For example, add kidney beans in chili, or red lentils in pasta sauce.

Mashed, cooked beans such as white pea beans or yellow split peas can be added to mashed potatoes. Potatoes with added legumes will have more fibre, protein and minerals. Lemon juice, herbs, or vinegar can be added for flavour.

Make potato patties by adding an egg to grated potato. Mix with your favorite herbs or spices, form into rounds and cook in a frying pan using a cooking spray.

If you have never cooked legumes, having a slow cooker is a real bonus. You don't need to soak the beans when using a slow cooker. Put the washed beans or peas in the pot and cover with cold water. Turn the slower cooker on "high" until it comes to a boil, and then turn it down to "low" and cook until tender. This may take 8 hours or more.

Other cooking methods include:

- Soak legumes in cold water for 8 hours or overnight, and cook in fresh water (to avoid producing gas) use 3 cups (750 mL) of water to 1 cup (250 mL) of beans.
- Quick soak method: cover 1 cup (250 mL) beans with 3 cups (750 mL) of water. Boil for 2 – 3 minutes, remove from heat and let stand for 1 hour. Cook in fresh water.

Seasonings make the difference

Herbs and spices may be purchased quite cheaply in bargain stores. Buy them in smaller quantities so they can be used up before their flavour is lost. To bring out the flavour in the dried herbs, crush them by hand or with a spoon.

Seasoning	Suggested use
Parsley	goes with everything
Thyme	beef
Sage and Savory	meat stews and bean dishes
Rosemary	chicken and vegetables
Oregano and Basil	tomato dishes
Paprika	adds colour and delicacy
Bouillon cubes	add flavours to soups or gravies (choose ones with no MSG)
Lemon juice or Vinegar	fish

Always taste while you are adjusting seasonings. If something tastes too salty, it can be corrected by adding lemon juice or vinegar.

Like fried foods? Why not braise?

Frying adds fat to our food and unwanted calories. Many foods can be braised – meat, poultry, fish, vegetables and even rice. Braise foods by adding a little oil to a non-stick frying pan, and sauté the seasoning ingredients such as onion, garlic, celery and herbs first for a few minutes to develop flavour. Add a little water to prevent sticking and burning. Meats can be added and allowed to cook covered until tender, over medium heat.

Braise rice, sauté it first with some seasonings until brown, and then add the necessary amount of water (about 2 cups of for each cup of rice).

Homemade salad dressings

Salad dressing can be made by shaking the ingredients in a jar with a tightly covered lid. A general guideline for salad dressings is that the acidic ingredients should be equal to or less than the oil.

If you use 4 Tbsp (60 mL) of oil, add 4 Tbsp (60 mL) lemon juice or 2 Tbsp (30 mL) vinegar. If you wish to reduce the amount of oil, replace it with an equal amount of water. [Note: one tsp (5 mL) of lemon juice is equal to ½ tsp (2 mL) of vinegar]

For example, use 2 Tbsp (30 mL) oil and 2 Tbsp (30 mL) water, and add 4 Tbsp (60 mL) or less of lemon juice or vinegar. Add pepper and other herbs that appeal to you. A pinch of sweetener may be used. Adding a bit of finely chopped garlic will add flavour. Shake well before using.

Remember one can enjoy tasty, nutritious meals and still stay within the budget.