

Planning Meals on a Budget

Planning meals can be very useful for both budgeting and maintaining a healthy diet. Planning and management is one of the four primary skills related to food literacy. Food literacy is the idea of proficiency in food related skills and knowledge. You may remember the term food literacy mentioned in the Level 1-2 facilitator training. This is because one of the overall aims of the Country Kitchens program is to improve food and nutrition literacy among Queenslanders.

In today's NutEd, we focus on the planning and management skill area of food literacy by sharing some tips for effective meal planning and budgeting. Remember, planning meals and budgeting can feel a little overwhelming for those who have not done it before, so it is important to suggest starting with just one or two strategies at a time, and slowly building up from there.

When planning meals on budget, there are three main steps:

1. Selecting recipes: This can be done in many ways such as writing a list of family favourites, looking through cookbooks and magazines or searching for ideas on the internet.

Budgeting tip: Try to select recipes within the week that use similar ingredients and/or ingredients you may already have at home in the fridge or pantry. You can refer to the healthy food staples guide we shared in the last NutEd for items you may already have to create a base for nutritious and delicious meals.

For a handy resource to help you get started planning meals for the week, check out the template from Children's Health Queensland: [Family Meal Planner Template](#)

2. Shopping for ingredients: After selecting your recipes for the week, check your pantry and fridge supplies to see what you already have on hand. Then make a shopping list of all the ingredients you will need to buy. Try to group the items by type so that it will be easier to make sure you get everything you need e.g. vegetables and fruit, meat and alternatives, canned goods etc.

Budgeting tip: If you find items that are on sale when you do the shopping, see if you can swap them out for something on your list to make it more budget friendly e.g. if cauliflower is on special, you could swap out broccoli in a stir-fry for cauliflower instead.

Children's Health Queensland have another handy template to help you organise your shopping list and prioritise purchasing healthy foods: [Shopping List Template](#)

3. Preparing your meals: Setting aside an hour or two to do some food prep on the weekend or a day during the week when you have some time to spare can really make a difference and help you stick to your meal plan. Try to pre-chop some vegetables, make up any planned snacks and even try pre-cooking components of the next night's meal.

Budgeting tip: Think about incorporating leftovers from one meal into another meal for the week e.g. leftover bolognese from spaghetti can be used with extra veggies or coleslaw to top baked potatoes another night.

For more information about planning healthy meals and other tips and tricks for getting children involved in the process, check out the toolkit put together by Children's Health Queensland: [Meal Planning Toolkit](#)

