

Making ends meet

Our top tips

How to shop smart

1 Use everything you buy

Think about how to get as much as you can from your meals. Use meat bones and vegetable trimmings to create stock like the chefs do. This can be the basis of soups, stews, pot pies or casseroles.

2 Buy in bulk

Look at the grocery shelves to find out if it's cheaper to buy the 5 pound bag of flour versus the 10 pound. Same with a 14 oz. can of tomatoes or a 28 oz. can. Don't be intimidated by size. Most items can be stored anywhere — under the bed, in your closet — as long as they are kept at room temperature.

3 Make it yourself

One of the best ways to cut costs is to cut convenience foods. That doesn't mean you have to become Betty Crocker. Look for pizza dough at your local grocery store and build your own gourmet pizza. Remember most fast foods were based on homemade favourites.

4 Stay on the outside

Spend most of your time in the store around the perimeter. This is where you'll find fresh produce, meats and dairy products. The centre aisles contain boxes and cans of ready-to-eat products, which can be more costly and are less nutritional.

5 Stick to the plan

Make a list and stick to it. Eat the free samples if they're offered, but don't get sucked into impulse buying for them. Also, make sure that you aren't hungry when you go to the store, as this can lead you into impulsive buying of snack foods or pre-made items, which will add to your food bill.

6 'Tis the season

Pay attention to what foods are in season and purchase those first. You can get great deals on a bushel of vegetables in the summer that you can freeze or can and use throughout the year.

Lower your food budget by changing the way you shop and eat

Cutting your grocery bill



Carol Enright says clipping coupons is completely new to her but she's turned it into a game and estimates she saves a whopping \$200 a month on groceries.

Idas Levato says reward cards help her family eat healthy and keeps her wallet in good shape.

From signing up for online coupons to points cards, people across Canada have drummed up creative ways to save money at the checkout counter during this economic downturn.

"I never have really been that price conscious at the grocery store because financially we never really needed to," said Enright, a stay-at-home mother of two, who has turned her weekly shopping trips into a game where she tries to spend only \$100. "But now my husband isn't doing as well. I'm trying to save where I can, and groceries, that's my domain."

Enright, whose hubby works in the hard hit financial sector, said her family has adopted a new approach when it comes to stocking the fridge.

She now buys generic brands, plans her meals for the week to avoid throwing out food waste and brown bags her husband's lunch for the work day.

She even keeps a log of all the sales in her car, so if she's in the area, she can pick up marked down organic milk instead of burning gas driving all around town to save 50 cents.

Levato said she turns to an

unconventional method of shopping for food — the drugstore.

"They offer those points now at Shoppers Drug Mart and a lot of those stores now offer groceries," said Levato, 36, also a stay-at-home mother. "You end up saving a lot of money that way."

With staples such as bread, milk and eggs available, Levato estimates her annual food bill savings to be between \$300 and \$400.

On a recent trip, she said she cashed in \$150 in rewards.

Pegah Aarabi of RedFlagDeals.com, a national website which helps consumers save money on virtually everything, says these smart minded moms are both right.

Aarabi said bigger chains have capabilities to offer more than your average fruit market. Grocers such as the Real Canadian Superstore can boast incentives such as free gas and a percentage

off the final bill, she said.

She said to capitalize on flyer deals, bargain hunters have to rifle through the pages when the papers arrive on Thursday or Friday and rush to the stores before the cheap goods fly off the shelf by Monday.

"You can see it all through their flyers they have recession pricing that, recession pricing this," Aarabi said.

"I mean, some of it could be just advertising, but definitely there are some amazing deals to be had... meats for example like t-bone steaks and that sort

of thing that were considered high end are now a lot less. As well as organics because they were considered to be so expensive. Higher end things are sort of brought down to more mainstream prices."

Ben Cho of groceriesavings.ca, a website which monitors sales at major food stores including Loblaw's, Price Chopper and No

Frills, says while food prices can differ

from week to week, there can be incredible savings when it comes to generic vs. brand names varieties.

"The number one thing is doing your homework and doing 'pre-shopping' before you go to the grocery stores," said Cho, who recommended going through your local flyer for deals. "Some brand names can go on sale and they are actually cheaper than the generic brands. I guess the main thing is to be on top of prices and know what's out there."

Astrid Poei, Sun Media

Some helpful websites include:

- save.ca
- groceriesavings.ca
- RedFlagDeals.com
- frugalshopper.ca