Healthy eating doesn't have to be expensive: An expert offers tips

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Groceries cost a lot, but it is possible to eat healthy foods without

overspending.

Experts at the University of Alabama at Birmingham offer tips for healthy eating on a budget.

"Maintaining a healthy diet is not only about what you eat but also about making mindful choices," said Emily Davidson, employee wellness manager at UAB. "A little planning, creativity and smart shopping can help people enjoy a nutritious diet without breaking the bank."

Planning your meals is key. It saves money that you might otherwise spend on impulse buys.

Plan for incorporating fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, Davidson suggested.

"When planning meals, look for what's in season," she said in a university news release. "Notice that some fruits and vegetables are more expensive during different seasons because not all produce grows year-round. Getting fresh fruits and veggies in their off-season is expensive because it requires extra travel and shipping costs."

Make a shopping list to help curb impulse buying. Shopping online and doing grocery pickup can help save money, too.

"Before heading to the store, list the items needed for your planned meals and stick to it," Davidson said. "This will help avoid buying unnecessary items that seem tempting."

Bulk buying of staples offers value for the money, Davidson said. Buy rice, beans, oats and frozen fruits and veggies in bulk.

Don't ignore frozen produce.

"Frozen fruits and vegetables are picked at peak season, so they are not missing out on taste or nutrients," Davidson said.

It can also help if you shop around, looking for discounts, rewards and coupons at different grocery stores and online.

"Comparing prices is even easier when shopping online," Davidson said. "Searching for a product and choosing the cheapest one is easier online as compared to navigating through other brands around the store."

Local farmers' markets often have fresh produce at a good price.

Make use of leftovers.

"Repurposing leftovers helps stretch the budget and reduces food waste," Davidson said. "For example, people can use a leftover roasted chicken in sandwiches, salads or pastas the next day."

Social media platforms are helpful sources of recipe inspiration.

Some foods, like olive oil, are worth investing in for a healthy diet, Davidson noted.

She recommends looking for cold-pressed, minimally processed oils. Unlike cheap oils that cause inflammation, Davidson said "they taste better and contain more polyphenols, vitamin E and different fatty acids, beneficial to health."

Also choose dark chocolate with more than 50% cocoa because it is rich in flavonoids and polyphenols, which are heart-healthy nutrients.

  More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers more healthy eating tips.