

Healthful foods on a budget

With a new year there often comes a new resolution to eat better and make healthier choices. But as the economy continues to struggle, so do parents trying to provide healthy food options on a budget. Families are always looking for ways to pull the purse strings tighter without compromising their children's health and nutrition.

"Even though many families will be shopping on a budget in the new year, nutrition doesn't necessarily have to come in second place to price," said Robert Murray, MD, director of the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Parents need to look at what they're paying for and determine if there are less costly ways to achieve the same nutritional benefits."

If you're shopping on a budget, there are five food trends to consider when making your weekly grocery list.

Frozen and canned goods

When it comes to fruits and vegetables, don't automatically rule out frozen foods. Frozen fruits and vegetables can provide the same level of nutrition as fresh. In recent years, preservation and freezing methods have dramatically improved, preserving the nutritional quality of the frozen fruits



Photo courtesy of Nationwide Children's Hospital

and vegetables. When opting for canned goods, choose fruits packed in 100 percent natural juice, and vegetables that are low in sodium.

What's organic worth?

When a food item is certified organic, the term refers to the methods used to grow or produce the food. Contrary to what many people think, organic foods offer no additional nutritional benefits compared to their non-organic counterparts, but they do cost more.

"Concerns about hormones, antibiotics or pesticides have driven many to choose organic foods," explained Dr. Murray. "But don't be fooled into thinking that because something is labeled organic it provides better nutrition or taste."

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Designer fruits

In recent years, exotic and often heavily-marketed fruits, like pomegranate and açai berries, have become increasingly popular. While these fruits are rich in antioxidants and vitamins, they also come with a hefty price tag.

"These fruits do have many health benefits, but many of the same benefits can be found in other more common fruits for a much cheaper price," said Dr. Murray. Dark, ruby-skinned fruits like plums, blueberries, cherries and other berries are a great, less expensive choice.

Fortified beverages

Be careful of drinks that are fortified with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Not only do they cost more, they often have more calories than you think. Sports drinks rich in

electrolytes may be a good choice for serious athletes who participate in intense physical activity for extended periods of time, but for most children and adults these drinks are unnecessary.

Paying for prepackaged

Prepackaged, grab-and-go options offer convenience and portion control but can cost more. For some busy families, the time saved by purchasing these items, especially prepackaged fruits and vegetables, may be worth the additional expense. This is especially true if the convenience of the items encourages families to make more nutritious choices.

To save some cash, purchase bulk items and individually package them at home for an easy, on-the-go grab. Plan snacks ahead of time and be sure to combine food groups to maximize nutritional value. Be sure to pay attention to portion size in order to avoid serving up too much of a good thing.

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.