



A Month of Cal-Fresh Meals from UC Cooperative Extension's "SNAP-EE Monterey County"



In 2011, 40 million Americans are receiving food stamps. The program is now called SNAP: the Supplemental Food Assistance Program~ and in California, we call it Cal-Fresh .



Whatever name is used, it means that recipients are trying to feed their families for about \$5.00 a day per person or less. The 17.8% of Monterey County residents who live below the poverty line can also obtain groceries through the Food Bank of Monterey County, which has served 92% more community members over the past 3 years, but it is still difficult to nourish the family on such a thrifty budget.



Live on \$5.00 a day for food? Can it be done? The University of California Cooperative Extension implements the Cal-Fresh Education Program in Monterey County, and staff is starting the New Year right by living on just such a food allowance for the month of January.

Follow along on Face Book to find menus, shopping lists, recipes, nutrient analyses, cost analyses and journaling on the personal impact of this \$5.00 a day regime.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/edit/?id=127600380589436#!/notes/snap-ee-monterey-county/living-on-a-food-stamp-budget/176479205718915>



UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA
**Agriculture &
Natural Resources**





The Test Begins



Sunday, January 2 was a rainy day, perfect for recipe testing. At the end of the day, I'd eaten a breakfast of home-made yogurt topped with chopped apple (from my tree) and home-made toasted honey-oat cereal.

Lunch – my main meal- was a zucchini –cheddar-barley frittata, a piece of home-made wheat bread, toasted, a large Romaine and tomato salad, and tea. The tomatoes came from the end of my garden, and the Romaine WAS organic (\$1.49 a bunch- that made 6 salads). For a light supper I had another piece of toast with peanut butter and jam, an orange (organic AND traceable, from SLO County) and a cup of tea.

Total cost was only \$2.37, so it's a good start. No doubt that's because I made the yogurt – thick and mild, the way I like it – and it only cost 27-cents! Plus- SO easy to do. I use my old-timey oven, which has a pilot light- but you can use your slow cooker or even a thermos.

Also made the bread- small loaves (14 slices each, though) for 32-cents! You may say you "don't have time" for this- but I say- hey- it's raining, the football game is on- your yogurt could be developing and your bread rising AT THIS VERY MINUTE!
 Nutrition? 1275 calories; 51 grams protein, 39 grams fat, 192 grams carbs, 13 grams fiber (low!); 640 mg calcium (get out that supplement!); 1293 mg sodium; 4690 IU Vit A; 131 mg Vit C, plenty of the B vitamins.... but LOW in all types of fat and cholesterol.
 Going forward- breakfasts will be more or less the same (I like that menu; it's nutritious and easy).

Lunches for the most part will be simple sandwiches on my home-made bread, or soups. For dinner this week I'm planning: French Lentils and Ham Shreds with Cornbread and Sliced Orange and Avocado Salad (my mother has trees); Cajun-style Smothered Chicken and Barley with Mustard Greens (garden again); Montecristo Sandwich with Baked Sweet Potato Wedges and Sliced Orange; Roasted Root Vegetables with Swiss Sausage and Toast; Tuna Burger (Think your grandmother's Tuna Croquette recipe, repurposed as a burger) with Baked Garlic Potato Wedges and Coleslaw.

No- I'm not feeling deprived. Just- hungry, thinking about all these yummy meals. Oh.. it's lunch time. Chat later!



Craving Chocolate – Eating Beets

Second full day of the Month of Living on a Food Stamp Budget held several discoveries about human nature. It all started well, with my yogurt-apple-oats breakfast. The sandwich lunch - on home-made whole wheat bread, with a bit of sharp cheddar, thin slice of good ham, romaine lettuce and sliced tomato was very tasty, especially with a sweet orange for dessert.

But, by the evening, extreme craving set in after only two days without my nightly “medicinal” (LOL) dark chocolate. I’ll get over it. The carefully planned dinner of French Lentils was also left by the wayside, since I discovered some items in my fridge, leftover from holiday company, that needed to be eaten.

I improvised a warm salad of steamed beets and Yukon potatoes in their jackets, minced onion, chopped hard-cooked egg, crumbled bacon, beets greens cooked with a bit of garlic in the bacon fat and a splash or two of seasoned rice vinegar. Very good and very satisfying! Later, for a sweet, I had some black berries frozen back in October. Warm milk with cinnamon ended the day.

No more cooking than I usually do – good thing, since both my day and evening were busy. Nutrition today: 1620 calories; 70 grams protein; 55 grams fat; 223 grams carbs; only 19 grams fiber L (I’ll find a way to eat some beans today); 1231 mg. calcium; 2130 mg sodium; a whopping 4293 mg potassium J; 9501 IU Vit A; 181 mg Vit C; plenty of B vitamins – but 2.54% too much cholesterol and 6.02% too much saturated fat (it’s that bacon- along with the egg, no doubt- but since these were low yesterday I think it all evens out).

In some ways I feel like a toddler, staggering around learning how to ride a trike. Veering between extremes; looking for balance. Balance will be: a meal plan that works from a financial AND a nutritional standpoint – AND one that is do-able in a busy work life – ‘cause that’s life, ¿que no?

Chat later -

Cajun Chicken and Barley



THIS dish was just delish! I have to admit, I'd only thought of barley as a good hearty addition to winter soups, but now I know it is a very nutritious whole grain that can provide a tasty, nutty base for substantial suppers. This recipe nestles a well-browned chicken thigh in a bed of cooked hulled barley in which sautéed garlic, onion and red bell pepper are blended. Add Cajun seasoning, chopped parsley, black pepper, a wee bit of salt and enough chicken broth or water to come up to the top of the food in the dish. Baked till liquid is absorbed and everything is tender.

Steamed broccoli crowns (the \$.50/lb broccoli bought in the morning at a neighborhood produce store) and a sliced orange finished the meal, and wow- it was SO good! I'd recommend hulled barley to anyone- it's not the same as the processed, pearl barley we all know, but from a nutrition and satisfaction perspective it is well worth searching out.

Speaking of nutrition, this day provided 1644 calories; 99 grams protein; 50 grams fat; 216 grams carbs; 30 grams fiber (just right!); 1006 mg calcium; 13.5 mg iron; 1277 mg sodium; 3599 mg potassium (you go, girl, if I do say so myself); 6729 IU Vit A; 337.5 mg Vit C; over 100% of all B vitamins and ALL low fat, including cholesterol.

Total cost for the day was only \$3.20 - probably because I had leftovers for lunch (cost already counted in original meal) and because the broccoli crowns were so inexpensive.

Today I have not felt deprived in any way. No cravings, either, despite having just leftovers for lunch. Hmm.. what does this mean? Can this new approach to food and eating be taking hold already? The nutrition is already swell. In a few more days I think I'll be confident enough about the costs to focus on convenience. THAT goal will be that if a person spends some time on the weekend pre-preparing some food items (while already doing regular household chores and errands), the dinner prep time during the work week should take no longer than would a trip to the fast food place, including the drive-through window time and the drive home.

Feeling encouraged, I'll sign off.

Chat later.

Roast Root Vegetables are a long-time winter favorite in my house, because they get that nice brown flavor that makes people forget they are not eating meat. So satisfying! However, last night a couple of neighbors came over for supper to “test out whatever you’re up to...”, and I knew the husband would not be in favor of a totally vegan plate, so I added some grilled turkey sausages – a tasty complement to the roasted roots. Also added to the roasting pan were a handful of green beans, after an afternoon conversation with a colleague who confided she thinks roasting snap beans with slivers of garlic is just the best!

The cold day had made me extra hungry – even though my breakfast fruit had been banana and my lunch a bit of soup- so I was ready to sit down with friends to a hearty dinner. Roasting veggies is so easy: just peel ONLY if necessary; cut in chunks; put into the roasting pan. Salt, pepper, a glug of olive oil (stirring all veggies well so that they are lightly coated); add herbs if desired and roast at 425F for about 45 minutes. During the last 20 minutes or so, stir every 5 minutes to make sure they get as evenly browned as possible.

“Vary your veggies” is good advice when making this dish. This time it included small red potatoes, Kabocha squash, pumpkin, carrot, Japanese yam, green beans, of COURSE onion and garlic, and some dried rosemary. There was such a lot when all was cut up that I had to spread them out on a small sheet pan so they could brown evenly. When the budget permits, a person might add mushrooms and bell peppers – or fennel, or celery root- but this basic meal was so good that even the husband was satisfied, as he spread grainy mustard on his turkey sausage and gave his nod of approval. We ate it with a generous Romaine salad dressed with lemon “vinaigrette”. My neighbors had brought dessert- fat-free, sugar-free frozen yogurt. Does that even QUALIFY as food? I don’t know, but it tasted pretty good.

Cost was “high” at \$4.42 for the day- but isn’t that often true when you have company? Nutrition: this day provided 1382 calories; 70.8 grams protein; 24.8 grams fat; 229 grams carbs; (only) 15 grams fiber (drat! I’ll have to deliberately search out some higher fiber foods); 1007 mg calcium; 17.34 mg iron; 1407.51 mg sodium; 4590.4 mg potassium; 20837 IU Vitamin A; 94.33 Vitamin C; well over 100% of the B Vitamins – and again, very low in all fats.

A note about neighbors- we garden and we share. All the time- not just when on a budget. There’s a lady in her eighties up the block who has a lifelong green thumb, a garden and several fruit trees. Her late husband even made a special shelf on the fence where she put lemons from her trees so that passerby can help themselves. The neighbor to the north has rosemary in her yard- so why would anyone buy it at the store? In turn she gets apples from me and I get collards from a fellow farther down the road. Isn’t that the way life should be? I think so.

Chat later!

Where do you shop for food?

This seems to be a burning question when trying to pinch pennies. Some folks recommend Walmart. A fellow from Lompoc wrote that he shops for vegetables and fruit at the 99-cent store, and has adopted a willingness to be surprised, since one day there he might find frisée and another day a batch of individually wrapped miniature Asian pears. There ARE some good local produce markets that offer discount prices. Look at the photo- post from earlier this week to find out what I bought for \$3.12!

There's also the school of thought that clips coupons and sets out on Saturday on a marathon shopping tour around the area. This sort of reminds me of the chap who comes into my neighborhood each week in a big gas guzzler of a truck; drives up one street and down another and pokes through folks' recycling bins. It makes me want to laugh, since every time he revs up his vehicle, another 50-cents or so of gas is burned (that's 7 soda cans, in recycle-speak).

With careful planning that pays attention to foods in season and store specials, I think you can still shop at your favorite store. "Careful planning" means building a shopping list based on nutrition needs (how many portions of grains – or vegetables and fruit- or protein rich foods – will be needed for the week?). Match up those needs with the bargains you find; calculate just how many oranges or chicken legs you might need – and make your list.

Set out to the store. Stick to your list. Do NOT give in to impulse purchases. BE STRONG! Know that you may have to give up that cheese, for example, if the other items add up to more than your budget allows. When you're home with your grocery bags (re-usable, of course- that saves 5-cents a bag and every penny DOES count)... then and only then can you plan meals your family will enjoy.

Today was my day to shop. The photo shows what I bought. By the way- the apples and pears are organic. The total was a couple of dollars more than my \$35.00 "allowance", so I did not get any cheese. You can see that there is plenty of food for not only this week, but some items will last into next week and beyond.

You may be wondering what I had to eat yesterday. I had my usual yogurt-based breakfast; the leftover roasted vegetables turned into a delightful salad when dressed with a little rice vinegar and piled on a bed of Romaine..... and by the time I got home at nearly 8:00 pm after several errands, I was ready for – oatmeal! Porridge, actually. Loaded with chopped walnuts, diced fresh apples and dried peaches and pears, and fragrant with cinnamon, it was comfort food that really hit the spot. It reminded me of nights in my childhood when the family would head home after a day at the beach. We were all sun-burned and sandy and Mom was tired- and we kids were elated to hear "We'll have breakfast for dinner"! *(next page)*

I think that's probably OK now and then- and the nutrient analysis bears it out. 1364 calories; 48 grams protein; 35 grams fat; 232 grams carbs; 20 grams fiber; 933 mg calcium (get out the supplement!); 12 mg iron; 1243 mg sodium; 11665 IU Vit A; 136 mg Vit C; B vitamins >100% RDA except for Niacin (only 48 mg); all low-fat – that's what I ate. A family with hard-working folks or teens would want to eat more. Still better nutrition than fast food, eh? Cost was under \$3.25.

Today I scrounged around in my car to collect loose change to buy a diet cola. Tonight a friend is taking me out to dinner. Hey, I never said it would be easy!

Chat later-

Roasted Root Ingredients

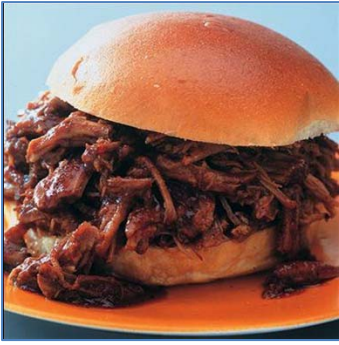


My Porridge Supper



“Loot” from a Successful Shopping Trip





Simplify! Putting Structure into Meal Planning Makes Life Easier...

If you know what you and your family like to eat, organizing a basic menu will simplify food shopping and preparation. Unless your crew really enjoys looking forward to “Taco Tuesdays”, it’s best to settle on a meal plan that is 8 days long- the odd extra day somehow tricks the brain into thinking that this is NOT a weekly repeating menu.

All you are doing is creating a framework – you can then vary the actual dishes to provide variety and interest and take advantage of fresh foods in their season. In my house, the framework looks like this:

Sunday: Meat (Beef, Pork, Lamb)

Monday: Pasta

Tuesday: Chicken

Wednesday: Sandwich, Soup or Salad

Thursday: Ground meat

Friday: Fish (this is usually going to be canned fish unless you have a fisher-person among your family and friends)

Saturday: Beans

(the following) Sunday: Casserole

The next cycle begins with Monday – Meat; then Tuesday – Pasta, an so on....

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According to store specials, THIS week my ACTUAL menu might look like this:

Sunday: Slow-Cooked “BBQ” Pork shoulder; Coleslaw; BBQ Beans; Cornbread; Sliced Orange

Monday: Bali-Style Whole Wheat Noodle Dish with Scallions, peanuts and red pepper; Green Beans; Vanilla Tapioca

Tuesday: Lemon-Roasted Chicken Thigh; Barley & Brown Rice Pilaf; Big Green

Wednesday: Pulled Pork and Slaw Sandwich on Home-Made Rolls; Baked Sweet Potato Wedges

Thursday: “Joe’s Special” (a San Francisco favorite of browned ground beef in a scramble with eggs, onions, spinach and a little cheese); W.W. Toast, Baked Cinnamon Pears

Friday: (Tuna) Fish Tacos (cabbage, tomato salsa); Pinto or Black Beans; Orange Wedges

Saturday: Slow-Baked Beans w/ Kale; W.W. Roll; Big Green

Sunday: Don Miguel’s Relleno Casserole (with corn tortillas, green chiles, eggs, onions, cheese); Tropical Fruit Cup (oranges and Mexican papaya, which is on sale for a VERY good price at the local discount produce store).

Hope the idea is clear! YOUR framework menu may be different- just remember, chicken once a week, ground meat once a week and a “hunk” of meat (at no more than \$2.89/lb – and cook extra for a dinner later in the week) is pretty much what is affordable on food stamps. The meat portion will top out at 3-ounces – but according to the newly published Dietary Guidelines guidance, you should “Enjoy your food – but eat less”, so that should be OK. The other- equally nutritious and delicious meals – must, of necessity, be based on pasta, grains and beans or legumes.

Then, when the store specials are published, it’s easy to see what your “actual” meals will be.

This planning habit will take hold in no time, and you’ll enjoy the security and simplicity it gives to your life.

Good luck with it-

Chat later-



Make Your Own Yogurt? Yes, You Can!

It's easy, and you'll have yogurt that is as thick and mild as you like it, full of gut-friendly enzymes. It will cost you from 22-cents to 39-cents per 8-ounce cup, compared to commercial yogurt for about 50-cents. Yogurt making will also give you a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

Here are some tips:

- Any containers and utensils you use must be scrupulously clean - (I scald 8-ounce canning jars by filling them with boiling water as the heated milk is cooling).
- Yogurt REALLY needs a peaceful place to "yoguer". Whatever method you use, be sure that the process can take place undisturbed and that the yogurt will not be moved till it is done.
- Don't use more starter than necessary! It IS so tempting (be prepared for this totally erroneous idea to cross your mind: if I add more, it won't take as long – or, it will be thicker. Both wrong!)

Yogurt can be made in a slow cooker- there are many good methods and recipes available online for this technique. It can also be poured into a pre-warmed thermos for the 8 hours it needs to develop. If you have access to an old stove with a pilot light, you can follow the following recipe. Here's the tried and true method I use.

- I like thick yogurt, so I first "reduce" the milk by simmering it over very very low heat on the stove-top so that some water evaporates and the remainder of the milk reduces in volume. I start with 1-quart and 1-cup and end up with approximately 1-quart. I put a long metal spoon in the pot to diffuse the heat so that the milk does not boil over nor scorch the bottom of the pot. I do this step about 1-hour before going to bed.
- About ½ hour later, I turn off the heat under the milk and scald the yogurt jars as described above.
- Perhaps 15-20 minutes later, the milk is lukewarm (about 110F). At this point I move rather briskly to pour the hot water out of the jars and pour the warm milk into them.

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- Then I measure 1¼ scant teaspoons of milk out of each jar into a small bowl. I add ¼ -teaspoon ONLY of fresh yogurt (for starter) into the milk, blend it well, and measure it evenly back into the jars, stirring well.

- The lids are put on loosely and the jars go into a baking pan filled with 1-inch of warm water and set in the center of my old-timey stove with a pilot light. There they stay for the next 8 hours while I am asleep. I'm not fond of overly sharp-flavored yogurt – and that WILL happen if the yogurt continues to set up for more than eight hours – so I remove it right away to the fridge upon awakening (I tie a dish towel to the oven door as a reminder).

That starter ratio is important. If you measure the warm milk before pouring it into jars- or into any other container- remember to use no more than 1-teaspoon of yogurt for every quart of milk. Mix the starter into a small amount of the warm milk to temper it, then blend it thoroughly back into the full amount of milk.

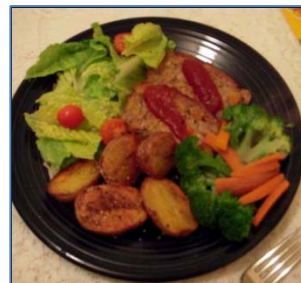
The resulting yogurt will be thick and mild in flavor. There will always be some clear whey on the top- this is VERY protein rich and you can drink it, stir it in to the yogurt or give it to a pet.

If you like sweetened or flavored yogurt, this is the time to stir in honey or sugar to your taste. A drop or two of vanilla? Fragrant. A nice dessert if you like the flavor is to put a gingersnap in the bottom of a jar and pour honey-sweetened, vanilla-flavored yogurt over the top. When you come home in the evening, you'll have a tasty treat.

As with many food preparation techniques we've sort of forgotten about, just reading about this may be tiresome. However, once you have gone through the process, you'll see it is easy as pie. Actually – a lot easier! Before you know it, it will be a great addition to your skill set and an unbothersome part of your routine.

Chat later-

Classic Americana – the Meatloaf Dinner



“Why not make meatloaf?” asked the voices of children past as I looked at the groceries I’d just bought on sale. Always a favorite with the family, and meatloaf sandwiches make a popular lunch to carry to school or work, so meatloaf it was, and oh my! It was good.

I remembered to add a bit of ground pork for flavor and I LIGHTLY mixed all the ingredients, this time with a spoon. Guess I’ve gotten wary in this age of food safety cautions – in the old days, I would have mixed it with my hands.

Two beaten eggs were used (not the single one shown) and cracker crumbs made the filler. Before there was Hamburger Helper, home cooks were stretching ground meat recipes with breadcrumbs, oats, or cracker crumbs, and I had some plain crackers left in the pantry from the holidays. I used the same spoon to LIGHTLY pat the meat mix into the loaf pan and shape it- lightly because to compact the mix, as we have a natural tendency to want to do, will produce a sort of hard and less appetizing result.

Nutrition for the day? 1479 calories; 78 grams protein; 53 grams fat; 182 grams carbs; .7 grams fiber (eek! I’m going to have to start eating shredded cardboard for breakfast); 926 mg calcium; 12 mg iron; 1356 mg sodium; 3423 mg potassium; 18589 IU Vit A; 193 mg Vit C; all B Vitamins good... but Sat Fat high (17 g instead of 10). Still, overall, pretty good.

Cost for the day: \$3.67 total

By now I can see some trends emerging- this regime produces a daily diet that is too low in fiber, and with calcium levels dipping low at times. It would not do for folks who want something different for breakfast every day. There’s certainly room in both the budget AND the “nutrient budget” to eat more and/or different foods.

The warmth of the oven for an hour was welcome on a cold day, and I was glad to have something tasty to offer my friend after he spent some time in the chill helping with yard work. This recipe makes 7 portions (2 slices each), and he demolished two. With extra ketchup.

Chat later...



Fish Tacos Rock!

Don't all Californians adore Fish Tacos? And, if fresh fish filets are not available, this family recipe using canned tuna makes tacos that will have everyone asking for more. The trick is in the sauce: fresh cut tomato-chile-cilantro salsa blended with mayo AND plain yogurt.

The trick is in the tortillas- fresh counts! The trick is in the crisp cabbage (fresh REALLY counts, here- a freshly harvested cabbage is almost sweet. As they age, they get that bitter taste that makes many people say they don't like cabbage at all. If you are one of these, find some fresh cabbage at a farmer's market and try again. It's such a good vegetable, it's worthwhile re-visiting).

The final trick is in the lime squeezed over all. Look for key limes on sale- or find a neighbor with a back yard tree. This really makes the difference.

So- beat up an egg. Add 1 can light tuna and blend. Grate in a little onion; salt and pepper the mix. Add enough cracker crumbs to hold the mix together. Shape by hand in small patties, and dust the outsides in a little more cracker crumb. Sauté 2 minutes on a side in 1-TB olive oil over med-low heat; turning once, till golden brown. Save on a paper-towel lined plate till all are cooked. Assemble tacos immediately and enjoy with sweet orange wedges and black or pinto beans.

Note: These patties can also be used as "burgers". You may remember your great grandmother shaping them differently and serving them as "Croquettes", with White Sauce. Repurposed as Tacos I think they might become a family favorite. Thanks to Eva Arriaga for providing her home-style recipe.

With my standard yogurt/oat breakfast and a pbj on home-made bread for lunch, today's nutrition came in at: 1595 calories; 80 gm protein; 52 grams fat; 214 grams carbs; 8.5 grams fiber; 1337 mg calcium; 11 mg iron; 1669 mg sodium; 3017 grams potassium; 1451 IU Vitamin A; 143 mg Vit C; B Vitamins made a strong showing; Sat Fat was 12% over optimum (: (); 42% of RDA for cholesterol. Pretty dang good!

Chat later-

Meet the Food Frugalistas...



In planning for this project I discovered there are many people involved with similar endeavors- how to eat right for very little money. The Food Frugalistas, I dubbed them. Check them out for recipes, shopping tips and just to share in their experiences.

Here's Haley, baking delicious bread and sharing the recipe: <http://firefightersfamily-dhjc.blogspot.com/2010/05/idiot-bread.html>

Or- one of the best, <http://realcheapfood.com/?p=1357> The author is in favor of minimal cooking, and offers a recipe for squash: wash the outside. Put it in the oven. Bake it for an hour. Cut it open and eat it (except for the seeds). It's elemental! Here's his treatise (rant?) that offers help for people with no time to cook. It's pretty funny, and by the time you are finished reading it, you may be willing to put in a little more time in the kitchen.

"I searched on Google for the phrase "I don't have time to cook" and got about 1,270,000 results. OK... so just eat the food. You don't have to cook everything all the time.

Grab some kale, broccoli, collard greens, spinach, sprouts. Wash it off, eat it. Prep time: 30 seconds. OK, if that's too primitive for ya' — try a raw kale salad recipe. Oh, you want to have cooked greens? OK... steam it for one minute. (or five minutes) OR cook a bunch of it and have it on hand in the refrigerator to use for meals over a few days.

Carrots, apples, bananas, any frozen fruit. Prep time? None

Peanuts, walnuts, almonds. Same prep time as above.

You can eat tofu right out of the package if it's sealed. If it's from a big container of tofu, you might have to heat it for 5 minutes. 5 minutes. FIVE MINUTES. Geeze, you'd spend more than five minutes going through the drive-through at lunch time.

Put a half cup of old-fashioned rolled oats in a bowl. Pour on some milk or juice. Prep time: uhm... 45 seconds? At the most?

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How about a glass of milk? That's real food that's cheap. That's a good snack or part of a meal.

Whole wheat bread with peanut butter is good food. Does that take too much time?

Some food does need to be cooked, like rice. Cook a pot of rice one day, takes about half an hour. If you cook two cups of raw rice (or quinoa, or barley, or amaranth, etc.), you'll have enough cooked whole grain for a week, at least. Put some of it in the freezer so it won't go bad, and keep some in the refrigerator. Now you've got rice on hand. 30 minutes one day, rice (or quinoa, or barley, or amaranth etc.) on hand for a week, rice that you can open, spoon into a bowl or take-it-with-you container in about one minute. Pretty convenient.

Do the same thing with a chicken. Roast a chicken. Takes about an hour. Pull off all the meat, freeze most of it. That takes another 15 minutes. Now you have chicken meat in the refrigerator.

Pre-cooked rice and chicken, a carrot, some raw broccoli, there's your complete meal prepared in a couple of minutes. Literally, a couple of minutes."

Note: the fish tacos the other night were sublime – but due to all this cooking ahead, I now have a freezer full of really tasty meals. It means I can come home from work and pop one in to heat and dinner is ready in almost no time.

I think that's what most of us wants, right? And I'm willing to put in an hour's extra effort on the weekend WHILE I DO MY OTHER HOUSEHOLD CHORES, so that I can have my convenience and eat it too.

Chat later-



Leftovers Salad – a Familiar Office Lunch

Even if where you work or go to school is handy to an inexpensive restaurant, you may be like most of the folks who work in our office, and pack a lunch that is basically leftovers from dinner the night before. It's easy, convenient, hopefully nutritious and a very thrifty practice. Often, a sprinkling of good vinegar over the leftovers – which are then layered over a pile of greens – transforms the dish into a tasty salad.

This past couple of weeks, the roast vegetable dinner was especially good for this, but diced leftover meatloaf and the end of the black beans from the fish taco dinner were also good - making a wonderful Southwest style lunch, accompanied by a couple of tortillas, heated in the microwave. It's easy to find a specially designed lunch box for this at your favorite discount store. Look for one with a large base for the greens; a "blue ice" layer that fits right in the middle; and two boxes with snap-on lids to top it all off. Your salad ingredients- with dressing- can go in these.

By the way, I did NOT test the special banana ice cream recipe on Thursday. Instead I tried the kale chips, and actually ate pretty much all of them (yes, all right – too much!). Cheese toast made a good counterpart. Thinking this meal would not interest many others, I did not analyze the nutrition, but I know it was huge in terms of Vitamin A, fiber, potassium and calcium.

Here is an example of going overboard to try to save money: at the beginning of this month, I gave up bottled water, knowing that it would be too pricey for my budget. This was a huge sacrifice, because the tap water where I live actually tastes nasty, and is so "chunky" that the typical aerator has to be removed from faucets. Anyway, I began to use filtered tap water, and by now I think it's "not that bad". On the day of the kale chips, I decided I'd filter the water I used to wash the kale (what was I thinking?). I did so, filled my water bottle and went off to work on Friday. Taking a long thirsty pull on the bottle about 8:30 I nearly gagged...mmm... like kale tea. DON'T try this at home.

The financial aspect of this project is turning out better even than I had hoped. In 2 weeks, I've spent \$55.78, or.....(drum roll) \$3.72 a day! That number comes from the grocery receipts, but I DO cost out each food item to 4 decimal places in a spread sheet- see the example here. Laborious, but gives an accurate cost for each item eaten.

It is the January thaw and the weather is glorious- I'm out to plant radishes, peas and beets.

Chat later.

Are You Steamin'?



Steaming? It's the way to go, for best retention of nutrients in the vegetables you cook and eat. It's also what makes meals a snap during the work/school week. Even before this project, it's been my habit to steam a collection of veggies – just until tender-crisp- on Saturdays and again on Wednesdays (along with a couple of eggs to hard cook). Then they are ready for anything: a work-day salad or soup lunch, a quick supper of fried rice and vegetables, a hearty soup or a noodle dish.

Noodle dishes are as infinitely varied as our familiar stir-fries, and don't take any longer to prepare. Rice stick noodles can be used – they just need to plump up in boiling water, somewhat like ramen-style noodles – or for more nutrition, I use whole wheat spaghetti which can be pre-cooked and held for a day or two in salted water in the fridge. The salted water supposedly prevents nutrients and flavor from leaching out of the noodles, or so say the chefs.

I sauté the drained noodles in a bit of oil with mashed fresh garlic and minced ginger – add any bits of meat or chicken that may be languishing in the fridge, and at the end, stir in a cup or so of steamed vegetables. I freeze broth in an old fashioned ice-cube tray, so I always have a couple of cubes to put into a noodle dish. I also like a little Vietnamese fish sauce, although that is not to everyone's taste.

On this day, though, my lovely steamed vegetables will make a salad lunch so nutritious I'll probably feel like Popeye after eating it. The total cost for all the vegetables in the dish pictured was \$1.02, and it will yield at least 3 (1 ½ -cup) portions. I used a "grab-bag" of discounted items bought for 79-cents. It included 1 red bell pepper, a couple of zucchini, 3 carrots, a chayote and 5 Brussels sprouts – an interesting combination that I might not have thought of on my own.

Tasty, though.

Chat later.



A Traditional Southern Supper

Black-eyed Peas and Collard Greens, Cornbread with butter and a sweet sliced orange. In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, I had a traditional southern supper- minus the fried chicken or pork chops, minus the rice and – no chess pie or cobbler for me! Just a lean, stripped-down version, yet savory and satisfying.

No wonder, because the dinner was nearly a thousand calories (certainly not ideal to eat two thirds or more of the day's calories at supper)! Just as well I ate only a banana at lunch (NOT a model of a good eating pattern, folks- but this is real life, and sometimes it's like that).

The greens were cooked on Sunday night, and then reheated. The peas bubbled away for most of the day while I was out at civic festivities. The cornbread- made with buttermilk and baked the old way in an iron skillet was the only task left in the afternoon. Fortunately it WAS a holiday, since I would not usually have the patience for baking on a Monday.

The secret to delicious black-eyed peas is to prepare a cooking stock in advance – I learned this trick years ago from a South Carolina friend. Water, diced bell pepper and onion, mashed garlic, black pepper, bay leaf, thyme and some sort of smoked pork product (ham hocks, smoked neck bones) – let it all simmer quietly for hours, then chill overnight. Any fat will collect on the top and can be discarded before using the stock for the main meal.

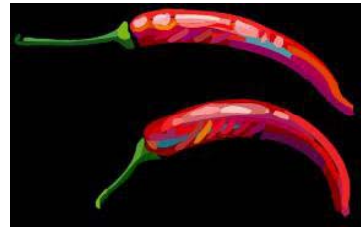
This dinner provided: 986 calories, 57 g protein, 14 g fat, 164 g carbs, 37 g fiber, 238 mg calcium, 14.6 mg iron, 444 mg sodium, 2291 IU Vit A, 143 mg Vit C, good B Vitamins and 67 mg cholesterol.

With a yogurt-cereal breakfast and a banana for lunch, the day's food cost \$3.18.

It's said that eating peas around the New Year will bring good money luck. Lentils or other legumes count, as do beans. Try cooking a pot at YOUR house this weekend ~ from Boston Baked to Red Beans and Rice, Saturday night has traditionally been bean night at tables around the nation.

Chat later.

A BBQ in Two Languages



A warm sunny weekend beckons. I am thinking about treats- FOOD treats. A member of the very vocal impromptu volunteer focus group that has grown up around this project recently wrote “after a hard working day a worker wants to eat his/her best dish as a reward ...” Agreed! And a festive BBQ on a balmy day is a special kind of treat or reward, even if it features succulent spicy chicken in lieu of a big hunk of beef.

Fortunately, chicken is almost always affordable. The trick is to not wear it out – “yummy!” is what we want to hear from families, not “aw.. chicken AGAIN?” Here’s a recipe for grilled chicken that will knock your socks off and earn you a reputation as a knowledgeable, multicultural chef. Since pineapple is pretty expensive, better serve it with a dish of oranges and Mexican papaya – they both are priced less than about 26-cents a serving right now.

Note: Yes, I am getting a little backed up on both nutrient and cost analysis. There are two other big job segments that are of more urgent priority right now. After three weeks on this regimen, I feel confident that this meal will work from both a cost and health point of view, and I WILL go back and fill in these essential details when time permits.

For now, enjoy the weekend- and your BBQ!

Daniel Prakash' Spicy Chicken BBQ

1. **Combine** and **puree** in a blender:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ **medium onion**, chopped
- 2-TBS fresh mint**, chopped
- 2-TBS cilantro**, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ - **tsp fresh garlic**, mashed
- $\frac{1}{2}$ - **tsp fresh ginger root**, mashed
- 3-TBS fresh lemon juice**
- 4-TBS Worcestershire** sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ -**cup olive oil** *(add a little water if this paste is too thick)*

2. **Add $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 med Serrano chile**, minced

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3. **Rub** most of this paste thoroughly into **1-lb** skinless **chicken** pieces; **marinate** 3 hrs
(Add a little oil to some of the paste to make a sauce for basting)

4. **Grill** as usual, **turning** several times, (baste with sauce each time) until thermometer shows an internal temperature of 165 F.

5. **Serve** with **rice pilaf** and **fresh pineapple** spears.

In Spanish...

El Pollo Enchiloso por Daniel Prakash

1. Combine en un mezclador:

- ¼ cebolla mediana, rebanada
- 2-cucharadas de hierbabuena, picado
- 2-cucharadas de cilantro, picado
- ½ -charaditas de ajo, amasado
- ½ cucharadita de jengibre fresca, amasado
- 3- cucharadas de jugo de limón fresco
- 4-cucharadas de salsa worcestershire
- ¼-taza de aceite de olivo

(Agregue poquito de aguasí esta pasta está demasiado espesa)

2. Agregue ½ - 1 chile serrano, picado

3. Embarre la mayor parte de esta pasta en 1-libra de pedazos de pollo sin piel; marínelos 3 horas. (agregue un poco de aceite a una porción del adobo para un salsa de rociar durante cocinar)

4. Cocine el pollo en una parilla, revolviendo algunas veces (pinte con la salsa cada vez), hasta que la temperatura interna esté esté 165F (por un termómetro).

Sírvalo con arroz y piña fresca.

From Feeling Pretty Smart to a Pity Party in 8 Seconds Flat – or, This is Harder Than I Thought!



“You’re trying to get people to slave away over a hot stove every day – and they won’t do it!” said a friend.

No- I am just trying to see if a person can actually be well-nourished on a Food Stamp budget, and yes, it IS a little more complicated than I originally thought. The hard part is not the planning – not the shopping – not the cooking – and CERTAINLY not the eating, since pretty much everything so far has been really tasty (except the batch of bread that lacked salt, because I’d forgotten it- NOT tasty, but still in the freezer, and I may HAVE to eat it!).

The hard part is the emotional part- the feeling that the part of life that connects to food is so constricted- so limited. A person might just want to go nuts- I did, a little bit, over the weekend. Made that fabulous spicy grilled chicken, and it was SO good- and it had been awhile since I had a hunk of animal protein- not ground, not shredded- and a wave of craziness washed over me and I ate 2 pieces! In less than a minute, there went the main part of a second dinner, swallowed right down. I felt very sorry for myself.

Then I sat down to do my accounts, thinking that would cheer me up- NOT! Last week I publicly boasted- “In the first 18 days of the month I’ve used only \$58.15 for food!” I figured that since I had a little “wiggle room”, I’d treat myself – to a tiny little grass-fed locally raised steak. No, I did NOT report it here! Yes- it DID cost nearly \$7. “Pride goeth before a fall” my grandma used to say.

I went on to buy milk, a small piece of cheese, a jar of peanut butter. When I added it all up I found I have only \$11.75 for the final week of the project!

Another might go for the Value Meal at a fast food joint- trouble is, I really don’t like that sort of food at all. I’ll grin and bear and just go on making meals from what I DO have- just, I suppose- as anyone does who really has a food budget as limited as this. The take-home is that this whole question is very complicated, and people who are struggling need support, never criticism.

Tonight I’ll have Pasta with White Beans and Tuna- that’s a wonderful dish that tastes positively luxurious. Here’s a link to a recipe -

<http://foodblogga.blogspot.com/2008/12/quick-italian-tuna-and-olive-pasta-for.html>

Marion Nestle wrote this to me

•January 20, 2011 - “Of course I think it’s terrific that you are doing so well on a SNAP budget but you prove my point. It can be done, but not easily by most people. Keep up the great work! Courage!” Courage is right. Chat later -

A perfect dish for someone in a hurry, with no time to cook. A perfect dish for unexpected guests – because the ingredients are right there on the pantry shelf. This meal is so tasty that children, guys and picky eaters love it too- a big plus, if you are the one fixing meals for folks like these.

The beautiful photo is borrowed from a blog that also features a recipe for the pasta-see post from Day 18. My “recipe” is pretty easy, too: For 2 servings,

Sauté 3-4 cloves mashed garlic in a little olive oil just until soft.

- Add 1 can of tuna, un-drained (For this I’d use tuna in oil),
- 1½ cups white beans and at least ½ cup of their cooking liquid,
- about ½ -tsp dried oregano,
- a little salt and plenty of just ground pepper.

Bring to a simmer and stir in

- 2-cups cooked thin spaghetti. Blend well and serve immediately, with plenty of ground Parmesan and
- a Big Green (salad).

Italian Pasta with White Beans and Tuna



The whole thing, start to finish, takes about 15 minutes (and that’s mainly because whole wheat pasta needs to cook for 10 minutes) . Nifty!

Nutrition for this meal: 793 calories 61 grams fat, 92 grams carbs, 18.4 grams fiber, 611 mg. calcium, 9.23 mg iron, 870 mg sodium, 1647 mg potassium, 14018 IU Vit A, 60 mg Vit C, from 30-80% rda for B Vitamins

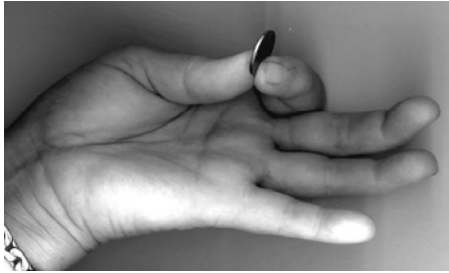
Notes:

- If you buy parmesan when it is on sale and have someone with strong arms grate it all up for you, you can then put it into a jar in the freezer. You’ll then enjoy delicious “fresh grated” parmesan for less than you’d pay for the green can at the market.
- Finding a good brand of whole wheat pasta is a task you’ll be glad to take on, because although brands vary greatly in taste and texture (there are a couple that would convince a person NEVER to change to whole grain!), there are some that are delicious and satisfying. If members of your family are reluctant to make the switch, try mixing whole grained with refined- increase the amount of whole grain in the blend until everyone likes it. Whole grain pasta is lower in calories and carbs, and higher in fiber.

Truth is, if this idea doesn’t “take”, you can still eat oatmeal, popcorn and other whole grains. You may eventually find that refined grains don’t suit you, because you have become accustomed to the heartier taste of whole grains.

- If you buy whole peppercorns and grind them yourself, it is less expensive than ground pepper and has a fresher flavor, too. Do you have a molcajete or mortar and pestle? It's good for crushing just the few peppercorns you need for whatever you're cooking.

Enjoy this meal- chat later.



Ashamed of Eating Greens, Rice and Beans? Here Are Some Words of Wisdom ...

This commentary, offered by a reader, has a lot to think about, whether you are on a tight budget yourself or in a job that aims to provide education and/or relief to those who are pinching pennies. It's important to us all to consider the points made here!

"Hang in there! You're right about the psychological aspects -- it's a conditioning thing. Food as entertainment, food as status, food as emotional reward -- those are all very powerful mindsets.

You might think of overspending on ...food as being a powerful habit like smoking. When a smoker quits, it's horrible, the smoker feels deprived and can't see how life is worth living without cigarettes. Well, the convenient processed food habit is kind of like that.

I also think there is something about looking at it as an "experiment" that has a short time frame affects the whole experience. It's a relationship with food, and we all know that we approach a short-term affair a lot differently than we approach a possible marriage. If it's a challenge that you try to perform for one month, then you're not thinking about stocking up on staples when they are on sale, for instance. Also remember that it's a change -- trying to do the same thing you used to do for \$150 a week, but spending only \$35 a week now... well, that's a frustrating way to go at it.

There's also the social, approval-seeking aspect of wanting to look good in the eyes of people who want to eat out and eat expensive processed overpriced stuff all the time. If I'm ashamed of eating greens, rice and beans, then I am tempted to work harder than necessary in order to try to meet the expectations of those to whom eating at home means picking up \$15/meal sushi on the way home. Nutritionally, a can of sardines and some collard greens provide about the same nourishment at a cost of about \$1. Emotionally it's lot different. It requires self-confidence and a strong ego to eat differently from those whose approval we seek.

Purely nutritionally, it's EASY and doesn't take much time at all to eat very healthy meals for little money. It's the new relationship with food that's so difficult. New relationships are hard. And without serious self-examination and understanding our real needs and values, most of us tend to move into new relationships that turn out just like the old failed ones, don't we?"

... *Chat later...*

Deliciously Back on Track



The finish line for this month- long project is fast approaching, but it won't be the end of my explorations of the complicated relationship between people and the food they eat. For today- the sun is bright, I have meetings coast-side so preparing food during daylight hours is possible and I enjoy the first back-porch supper of the year.

A bit of really good luck came to me today. You may recall, I had only eleven dollars and some change clutched in my grubby little fist to last from the 26th through the 31st. I needn't have worried, for waiting for me in the market was a package of chicken thighs (\$2.11) and a nice hunk of pork shoulder- enough for 5 dinners (\$3.05).

Stopping at the produce mart on the way home I picked up a couple of bananas, some radishes and a discount grab bag with cucumbers, zucchini and bell pepper, all of which must be eaten quickly. Total? \$3.11.

Looks like tonight will be Roast Pork Shoulder with a No. Carolina- style glaze, sautéed apple chunks w/cinnamon, and lots of butternut squash chunks. Sautéed because I was in a bit of a hurry to finish the supper while there was still light enough to take a picture- but I'll do this again, because it came out a little caramelized and delicious. I tossed in about a half-teaspoon of caraway seeds at the end – yummy!

Nutrition for this day, including yogurt-cereal breakfast and salad lunch, was: 1750 calories, 77 gm protein, 61 gm fat, 247 gm carbs, 32 gm fiber, 1030 mg calcium, 12 mg iron, 1828 mg (high for me) sodium, 3710 mg potassium, 23030 IU Vit A, 220 mg Vit C, B Vit good except for Niacin (only 1.67), 94 mg cholesterol.

The cost? \$2.95 for the day – this includes the 12%-25% "X-factor" I add on to all meal calculations, to cover salt and pepper, a glug of ketchup or other teeny quantities of food too laborious to cost out on their own. A chef's trick- every cent counts, all the way to the 4th decimal point!

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The supper was as appetizing as it looks! (Caution about pork shoulder- also known as pork butt – it is so tender and flavorful because it is VERY fatty- important to cook it far enough in advance so that you can let it cool and degrease it thoroughly before serving. Worth the effort- you'll love it, as will anyone who shares a meal with you).

Also planned:

- Pizza (topped with chicken, bell peppers, sliced tomatoes and zucchini)
- Pilipino Pork Adobo with 2-Grain Pilaf (Brown Rice and Barley); Big Green
- Chicken Cacciatore over Whole Wheat Linguini, Sliced Oranges
- Pork and Chicken Saté (Indonesian), Nasi Goreng (Fried Rice, Indonesian Style); Fruit Salad
- Montecristo Sandwich with Sweet Potato Wedges Fries, Big Green

So yes, I'll be well-fed – and I still have \$3.00 left over.

The acacias are blooming, spring is coming and I am optimistic about my ability to continue eating a little farther down the food chain than I have in the past. Very curious where this path may eventually lead. More research is DEFINITELY needed!

Chat later.



Chicken and Big Green on the Back Porch

45 minutes start to finish, from entering the house after work to wiping the last bit of sauce off my chin (it cooked while I changed clothes, read and answered mail, did a load of laundry and watered the radishes emerging from the wee box garden in front of the house). Cost for dinner about \$1.60. OK; here's the recipe (for one):

1 chicken thigh - olive oil - 1 clove garlic - ¼ medium onion - 1-heaping TBS tomato paste
1-cup chicken broth - 1-cup water - dry oregano - pepper, salt - cooked whole wheat pasta
grated parmesan - chopped parsley

- Set oven at 400F. Dredge **1 chicken thigh** in flour; shake off excess. Brown in **a little olive oil** over low heat.
- Turn chicken to brown on other side. Meanwhile, coarsely chop **1 large clove garlic and about ¼ medium onion**.
- Put browned chicken into baking dish and into the oven. Add garlic and onion to the pan you used for browning. Sauté till clear and limp. Meanwhile, cut up **salad ingredients** and put into bowl.
- Add **1 heaping TB tomato paste** to pan; let sauté for half a minute. (I use the kind that has “**Italian herbs**” in it). Add about **1 cup chicken broth and ½ cup water** to pan; blend well; let it “boil up”. You know how it is with tomato paste- you'll probably need to add more liquid at this point, since you want a nice consistency to the sauce. Add about **½ teaspoon dried oregano; a teensy bit of salt and plenty of pepper**.
- Let sauce simmer REALLY low for 5-6 minutes.
- In another pan, sauté **1 cup cooked drained whole wheat pasta** in a dab of olive oil, stirring so that it heats evenly (pasta has been stored in your fridge since the Pasta with White Beans and Tuna dinner earlier in the week).
- Put pasta on plate, top with sauce, top with chicken. Sprinkle **a little parmesan and chopped parsley** on your dinner (both from the freezer where they wait patiently, to be at hand whenever you need them).
- Take main dish, salad, **a slice of bread w/butter**, your mail and the paper – out onto the back porch. It's taken you about 30 minutes to accomplish all this.

Relax! Enjoy!

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Here's the nutrition for the day: 1315 calories, 89 grams protein, 33.5 grams fat, 86 grams fiber (all that salad at both lunch and dinner- but don't worry – this is SOLUBLE fiber. You will not explode), 169 mg calcium (oops!), 19 mg iron, 544 mg salt, 3074 mg potassium, 9684 IU Vitamin A, 236 mg Vitamin C, B vitamins all good, 11 mg cholesterol.

What is wrong with this picture? Delicious day, but skimpy on nutrients. Which explains why I got back out of bed at 10:15, stood over the sink and ate **4 spoonfuls of peanut butter** straight from the jar, with **a little honey** dripped over the top. Oops! Guess it can't hurt, now and then.

Chat later-

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(on the next page)

Pizza, at Last!



It was the weekend- a friend had treated me to Friday night tacos before the movie, and so on Saturday, with plenty of time and the pounding rain telling me to stay inside, I made pizza, at long last.

Ordinarily I don't eat much pizza, and I like a thin crisp crust with weirdo toppings (braised endive, shrimp and fennel seeds, anyone?). However for this project – and based on what was left in fridge and pantry – I went a little more mainstream. I used the recipe found at this link for the crust only.

<http://alleasyfoodrecipes.com/blog/pizza-recipe/idiot-bread-pizza-recipe/>

The recipe made 2 pizzas of the size show in the photo. Enough for 16 generous slices. I was just unable to spread it thin enough on the pans! I tried and tried, but the dough would not stay spread out – so I ended up with a thicker pizza, sort of like the “French Bread Pizza” often served in school lunches. Certainly filling (but too much bread, for my taste). It would be a good snack for an athlete, teen or hard working person.

For the topping I used my trusty Italian-flavored tomato paste, thinned down just a little and spread over the two pizzas.

I then layered over the sauce: 3 cloves garlic, minced small; 1 large zucchini (sliced and sautéed), ½ red bell pepper (also sautéed), about 3-ounces of chopped ham and 8-ounces grated part-skim mozzarella (cost- \$2.99). Sprinkled the pizzas with black pepper, red pepper and oregano and baked them in a 500F oven for about half an hour.

Except for the mozzarella, I did not buy anything especially for this meal. I only ate one piece of pizza (gave away some to a fellow who lives in his camper and froze the rest), and had Big Green, a yogurt breakfast, a pbj with milk for lunch. I am confident this day came in under \$3.50.

Nutrition for the day was 1698 calories, 88 grams protein, 39 grams fat, 253 grams carbohydrates, 6.35 grams fiber (low), 1753 mg calcium, 11.25 mg iron, 1617 mg sodium, 3740 mg potassium, 4843.35 IU Vit A, 309 mg Vit C, 1.94 mg thiamin, 1.98 mg Riboflavin, 71 mg Niacin and 84 mg Cholesterol.

Days that have not been written about here are days when I ate “planned-overs”. I accounted for them financially by tallying up grocery receipts and subtracting the value of items as yet uneaten. It looks like I went over by about \$4.00. As you may have noticed, the only beverage in the plan has been milk. Yes, I love my coffee- but got several pounds at the holidays as a gift. It is definitely not in the budget, nor are soft drinks, teas or fruits juices. Still, over all, I have demonstrated to my satisfaction that a person can, indeed be very well-nourished on \$5.00 a day or less.

People needn't go hungry – and that's the main thing.
Chat later-

We Live in Lettuce-Land ... *Looking Back at the Month on a Food Stamp Budget*



Here in Monterey County we live in the Salad Bowl, where colorful lettuces literally sprout from the cracks in the sidewalk. It's easier, here, to live a healthful life on a teensy budget, because abundance is all around us. For this we are all quite thankful, to be sure.

Wherever you are, you CAN nourish yourself well on very little money. It may mean that you shop someplace new (The 99-cent store for veggies and fruits).

It may mean that you become more neighborly, and trade your oregano for your neighbor's extra tomatoes.

It may mean that you try baking bread some rainy Saturday – for the very first time.

It may mean that you plant a little dish garden this spring, so that lettuces and peas are right outside your back door.

It may even mean that you band together with several others to shop collectively at a membership warehouse store. Perhaps you can't eat a pallet of strawberries by yourself, but sharing with 6-8 others in an informal buying cooperative, you can enjoy the same bargains (thanks to a reader from the Sacramento area for this last idea!).

It will certainly mean that you'll be planning your meals in advance, and buying foods in their own seasons. No doubt you'll prepare more food at home, and maybe polish up your cooking skills.

There's a lot more to learn. Teens have asked me to provide a meal plan they can do with no more difficulty than their current micro-waved noodles or mac'n'cheese – THAT's a huge challenge! Many have asked me to provide a food shopping guide that sets dollar and cents limits for various types of food "No more than \$1.49 for a nice heavy head of Romaine", for example. Many asked for help with menus - find this on pages 8-9.

Thank you to those of you who have helped this project along: Colleen from KION, Sara from Monterey Coast Weekly; Chris from Network for a Healthy California and Mathew from Real Cheap Food, among others.

Thanks for sticking with me on this journey. ... this journey that is just beginning.

Chat later -



Fish Taco ingredients



Chicken & Barley ingredients



Meatloaf ingredients



Side Yard Salad Box

Eat, Enjoy ... and Share with Your Friends.