

# Tips for saving money on your food bill



Here are a few tips on how to keep to your healthy eating goals, cut down on food waste and save money on your food bills.

**1 Meal planning** – whether you're looking to prepare all your dinners for the week in the weekend in bulk, or you like to cook from scratch every night, it helps to have a plan so you avoid resorting to takeaways. Plan your meals and make a shopping list so you've got all the ingredients ready if you plan to cook nightly. Shop specials and buy in-season produce. Have a handy list of quick weeknight meals that you can whip up in under 30 minutes. You can download a meal planning app such as [Appetise](#), [Mealime](#), and [Mealboard](#). [Love Food Hate Waste](#) also has a handy guide of four Cs that will help you plan better and save money. 1. Check your week, 2. Check what you've got, 3. Choose your meals (including how you'll utilise your leftovers), and 4. Create your list. Check out the [Food Critics website](#) to get healthy recipes for the whole whānau and download your weekly food planner.

**2 Make meals go further with leftovers and reduce waste** – leftovers can be easily repurposed for tomorrow's dinner. Think butter chicken pie, leftover rice into fried rice, roast veggie quiche (great for lunchboxes), shredded roast chicken tacos, cottage pie made from ragout, or the endless possibilities with a bumper batch of bolognese sauce (see tip 3). Be creative!

**3 Make a humble ragu/bolognese sauce in bulk** – more than just for pairing with spaghetti!

Make a traditional beef mince (or combine with pork mince), or [lentil bolognese](#) sauce in bulk (double or triple your usual recipe) and still make a different meal every night for a week (or even two). Put half into a plastic container and pop into the freezer for another week. It keeps well in the fridge so you can alternate with non-bolognese meals between. Increase the fibre and make it go even further by loading up your sauce with vegetables. Add onions, garlic, carrots, celery, grated courgettes, pumpkin, or even beetroot to your sauce. In the final couple of minutes of simmering, you can add frozen peas or corn. Tamariki will hardly notice, and veggies add extra sweetness to your sauce, so you'll need little or no sugar to balance the flavour.

## Example meal plan with bolognese sauce

MEAL 1 – Spaghetti bolognese

MEAL 2 – Top with mashed potato and grated cheese, and bake in the oven for cottage pie

MEAL 3 – Add tinned kidney beans, all spice, paprika and chilli for nachos (or burritos, or tacos)

MEAL 4 – Layer with grilled eggplant and/or sliced potatoes and [béchamel \(white sauce\)](#) for moussaka

MEAL 5 – Pair with cannelloni or lasagne and [béchamel](#) topped with cheese

## Brunch ideas

- Mince and beans on toast (with or without an egg done your way)
- Sloppy joes
- Loaded wedges/fries
- Puff pastry triangle pies

**Bonus tip** – render down cheaper, fattier cuts of beef and reserve the tallow for frying, cooking or baking with later.

- 4 Meat-free days** – incorporate some meat-free days into your week. Meat can be a significant portion of your food bill and cutting out meat for a meal or two a week also helps reduce your environmental impact. Reducing your meat intake can have positive health benefits such as lowering cholesterol and reducing inflammation. Balancing these meat-free meals with a protein alternative such as tofu, chickpeas, kidney beans or even eggs will give flavour and fullness to your meals.
- 5 Beans, pulses and legumes are a great alternative source of protein** for your meat-free meals, and they can also be used to bulk out and add fibre to your meat stews, curries and bolognese. Puréed tinned chickpeas make excellent [hummus](#) for Mediterranean dishes, and dried chickpeas can be hydrated and minced into [falafel](#). Lentils can supplement or be the main protein source for burgers, stews and curries. Canned kidney beans can be added directly to chilli or mashed into ‘[refried](#)’ beans for Mexican style dishes. Check out [Sophie’s Mexican lentil soup recipe](#) – a spicy, hearty and healthy vegetarian meal.
- 6 Enhance the flavour of your cooking to make eating and cooking at home a delight.** Herbs and spices are your friends – use them and experiment with different combinations in your cooking. If you’re not sure where to start, a simple paprika, chilli, all spice, mixed herbs or Italian herbs is a good starter pack. Cumin, garam masala, coriander and curry powder are essentials for curries. Vegetable stock and miso paste can be a great way to add umami (a savoury taste) to your dishes. Vanilla essence and ground cinnamon are also essential for baking and desserts.
- 7 Check out [past issues of Close to Home for recipes contributed by Sophie Gray](#)**, author of *Destitute Gourmet*.
- 8 Grow your own kai** – start your own veggie patch at home or in your complex. Check out [past issues of Close to Home](#) for seasonal gardening tips.

Did you know that you can keep the root end of a spring onion and continue to grow it? Immerse the roots in a shallow dish of water on your windowsill and in about a week you’ll be growing a spring onion you can snip off and use in your meals, or plant in the ground.
- 9 Join a fruit and vegetable co-op in your local area** – cost is around \$15 per week, and you’ll get fresh, seasonal produce ready for collection. Search online for a co-op in your area.
- 10 Buy dry goods in bulk** – dry goods grocery stores such as Bin Inn and independent refillerie specialise in supplying what you need in bulk by weight. The lack of branding and minimal packaging means you can save big on dried goods such as baking ingredients, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, legumes, rice, pasta, herbs, spices, seasonings and heaps more. You can also cut down on plastic packaging by saving your jars and storage containers (and have them weighed) for these shops also.
- 11 Try ethnic food markets** – have a go at sourcing your spices for curries and stews from your local Indian grocer or check out your local Asian grocery for specials on staples, eggs, fruit and vegetables, Asian sauces, rice, noodles and tofu at often a more competitive price than supermarket chains.
- 12 Budget for treats** – whether it’s for a fortnightly takeaway or for a small treat in your supermarket shop, it’s always a good idea to budget in the odd indulgence to help you stick to your goals.
- 13 Sign up to a community cooking class** – local councils and non-government organisations such as Salvation Army offer cooking classes to help whānau create delicious, cheap and nutritious meals in a sustainable way.
- 14 Bake bread** – got a talent for baking you never knew you kneaded? Why not bake a loaf of bread a week to supplement your usual pantry staple. If you’re up for a challenge, try a [rēwena](#) or a sourdough bread. Try making a sourdough starter (sourdough cultured yeast made from high protein flours) or ask a local bakery or fellow sourdough baker to share their discard starter with you. It can be tricky in the beginning, but once you bake a few loaves you’ll get the hang of it. There are a ton of resources and an online [community](#) of sourdough enthusiasts who are keen to help troubleshoot.