

Eating Healthy on a College Budget

A to Z (Okay, Y) List of Cheap, Healthy Eats			
Food	Price	Servings	Price per Serving
Almonds	\$3.99	11	\$0.36
Apples (bag)	\$3.99	10	\$0.39
Applesauce	\$1.75	11	\$0.16
Bananas	\$1.00	5	\$0.20
Beans, black, kidney, etc.	\$0.59	4	\$0.15
Brown rice	\$1.85	9	\$0.20
Canned chicken	\$1.29	1	\$1.29
Canned fruit	\$1.07	4	\$0.26
Canned pumpkin	\$1.79	5	\$0.36
Canned tomatoes	\$0.63	3	\$0.21
Carrots, baby	\$1.69	5	\$0.34
Carrots, whole	\$0.99	10	\$0.10
Cheddar cheese	\$2.29	8	\$0.29
Cottage cheese	\$2.49	6	\$0.41
Eggs	\$1.69	6	\$0.28
Frozen fruit	\$5.99	10	\$0.60
Frozen vegetables	\$1.25	5	\$0.25
Green tea	\$2.25	50	\$0.05
Microwave popcorn	\$1.99	4	\$0.50
Milk	\$1.89	8	\$0.23
Oatmeal	\$2.69	30	\$0.09
Oranges (bag)	\$3.99	10	\$0.39
Peanut butter	\$3.29	25	\$0.13
Peanuts in shell	\$1.00	3	\$0.33
Potatoes	\$3.99	10	\$0.40
Pumpkin seeds	\$2.09	4	\$0.52
Salmon pouch	\$1.35	1	\$1.19
Salsa	\$1.69	10	\$0.16
Spaghetti sauce	\$1.89	5	\$0.38
Spaghetti squash	\$2.50	4	\$0.62
String cheese	\$1.85	8	\$0.24
Sunflower seeds	\$1.99	7	\$0.18
Sweet potato	\$0.59	1	\$0.59
Taco shells	\$1.59	10	\$0.16
Tuna pouch	\$1.19	1	\$1.19
Whole grain bread	\$1.99	10	\$0.20
Whole grain tortillas	\$1.99	10	\$0.20
Yogurt	\$2.39	6	\$0.40

Breakfast Ideas

Starting your day with something filling is a big key in keeping your energy levels up all day AND keeping your weight down. Go for these cheap, quick, protein and/or fiber-packed choices, and whatever you do, DON'T SKIP!!

Eggs. Okay, okay, who wants to take the time to cook eggs in the morning and worse yet, have to clean up a dirty pan afterwards? A better solution is to hardboil some eggs to have on hand. The [quick food prep section](#) below will show you how easy it is—and wiping out the pot you use is nearly effortless ☺ Or, try these [egg mug recipes](#). Eggs and cheese spiced up with your flavors of choice, ready after about 90 seconds in a microwave—and just one mug to clean up. You can do this, people!

Oatmeal. Go with the flavored packets if you must, but look for the lower sugar and/or higher fiber kind. You'll get even more nutrition out of the less-processed plain oats that come in a canister and cook up in about 1 ½ minutes in a microwave. Try adding a banana, raisins, a tablespoon of syrup, or a couple teaspoons of sugar or brown sugar to get the flavor you want. You can save money with the healthier version too! Plain oatmeal cost 9 cents per serving, while the packs run closer to 25 cents each.

Cereal. The most classic breakfast of all—and what could be quicker, right? Just take note that Frosted Flakes and Fruity Pebbles tend NOT to stick with you for too long. And when the sugar crash hits you about an hour later, you may spend more money filling that pit in your stomach with a mid-morning snack than if you had chosen a higher protein/higher fiber cereal that might cost you just a few cents more per box. Top picks:

- Kashi – Original is healthiest, but GoLean Crunch is a little more delicious.
- Fiber One Original Bran Cereal – Deceptively good—my kids even like this!
- Post Shredded Wheat 'n' Bran – Okay, not a 10 on the taste scale. If you can't hack it you can go with the Frosted Mini Wheats varieties and you'll still be getting a lot of filling fiber.
- There are plenty of other good options out there. Ideally you want to look for 5+ grams of protein and fiber and < 10 grams of sugar.

And don't forget: Milk on your cereal or on the side will give you another boost of filling protein, and added fruit will pack hunger-busting fiber.

Yogurt. Full of protein, and a super choice to feed your sweet tooth without overdosing on calories. Greek yogurt has twice the protein of regular yogurt and will keep you full for hours. But be warned—all yogurts are not created equal! Go for low-fat or fat-free versions to keep the calories reasonable. Some yogurts are also notoriously high in sugar (20+ grams!)—not always a healthy move. Look for brands like Dannon Light 'n' Fit that have 15 grams of sugar or less. Hint: Vanilla flavor is usually lower in sugar than fruit types. If you REALLY want to be healthy, buy plain yogurt and sweeten it yourself with real fruit (fresh, frozen, or canned) and a teaspoon of sugar, stevia (a natural no-calorie sweetener sold under brand names like Truvia and PureVia), artificial sweetener (like Splenda or Nutrisweet), or agave nectar (doesn't spike your blood sugar like real sugar, but not calorie-free). **Make yogurt into a full meal** by topping it with some nuts or crunchy high-fiber cereal.

Smoothie. No, don't head to McDonalds for their sugar-packed version. Just blend some milk and yogurt with whatever you're in the mood for – frozen berries, a banana, a small scoop of peanut butter... Add some unsweetened cocoa powder for a breakfast version of a Reese's peanut butter cup!

Peanut butter. Okay, PB&J is traditionally a lunch food, but what's so great about tradition? Peanut butter is high in protein and heart-healthy fats, which combine to keep you amazingly full. And it's versatile as can be! Sure, you can go with the unimaginative sandwich, but it's also a great pair with fiber-filled apples, bananas, celery, carrots, and whole grain crackers. Just stick with a 2 tbsp size serving (about the size of a golf ball) to keep calories in check.

Cheese quesadillas. Got 40 seconds? Sprinkle a handful of shredded cheddar on a whole grain tortilla, fold it in half, and zap it in the microwave for 30 seconds (maybe you can even handle the assembly in under 10 seconds, making this breakfast choice even *quicker!*)

Cottage cheese. Alright, I hear you on this one—whether it's a taste or texture thing, not everyone can stomach cottage cheese. But if you can, the 15 grams of protein in a ½ cup serving make it a fantastic way to start your day. Pairing it with any of these fiber-packed picks will definitely keep you full until lunchtime:

- Fresh chopped apples with a sprinkle of cinnamon

- Fresh or thawed-from-frozen berries
- Canned pineapples, pears, peaches, mandarin oranges, etc., packed in juice or light syrup
- Carrots, celery, pepper strips, cucumbers, etc., for dipping

Green tea. No, it's not going to fill you up, but drinking green tea is an incredibly healthy habit. It takes only minutes to dunk a tea bag in some hot water, and it's only 5 cents a cup! Or brew a bigger batch in a pot and keep it in your fridge for a healthier, MUCH cheaper version of the store-bought iced teas that come in individual servings. Try to use stevia (or at least don't go overboard with sugar) if you don't like it plain, or combine the iced version with a little fruit juice for a "tea cooler".

Lunch/Dinner Ideas

The protein and fiber theme continues with these quick lunch and dinner ideas. Really—you'll spend less money on food if what you eat is filling!

Tuna, salmon, or chicken in cans or pouches. Incredible protein sources, cheap, and quick! What more could you want? Cans are cheaper, but the pouches are amazingly portable with no can opener required—if you like the taste of these plain. If not, you can easily whip up tuna, salmon or chicken salad by adding a tablespoon of mayonnaise, and whatever else you have the patience to chop up and toss in: hard boiled egg, carrots, celery, peppers, onions—even easier if you have pre-cut frozen onions and peppers on hand. If you like spicy, a few dashes of cayenne pepper, hot pepper sauce (like Frank's Red Hot), or pickled jalapenos will add a LOT of flavor (and maybe even kill the taste of fish if you don't like it!) Add enough veggies and you can stretch your \$1 tuna pouch into 2 servings. Spread it on bread, wrap it in a tortilla, or eat it stand-alone with some tortilla chips or a baked potato/sweet potato on the side.

Red beans and rice. 7 minutes to cook up some rice, and you can pop open and warm a can of kidney beans and a can of diced tomatoes while you're waiting—can you handle it?! Jazz it up with some spices of your choice (or buy the diced tomatoes that come with onions, garlic, or green chilies already in them) and you've got a SUPER-CHEAP meal that covers all the bases—protein, fiber, and lots of vitamins. Melt some cheese on top and you've hit all the major food groups!

Variations with already-cooked ground meat (see [quick food prep tips](#) below to learn how to prep and store ground meat)

Tacos. If you have pre-cooked ground meat on hand, it's a snap to heat it up with a little water and taco seasoning, fill up some taco shells, and top with salsa and cheese—or maybe even fresh lettuce and tomato if you're not afraid of a little chopping 😊

Chili. Ground beef or turkey, a can of beans (optional but highly recommended), 2 cans of diced tomatoes, 1 small can of tomato sauce (about 40 cents), some frozen onions and peppers if you like, and a chili seasoning packet (< \$1). Throw it all together and heat for 15 minutes. Done.

Soup. Here's a really simple one: ground beef or turkey, a can of diced tomatoes, 2 cups water, cook some elbow noodles on the side and add them when they're done. Flavor with some onion salt. If you want to amp the nutrition, add some frozen veggies and/or a can of beans. It takes all of 15 minutes to put together!

Loaded Baked Potato. Microwave a potato for 3 minutes. Turn over and cook for 2 – 4 minutes longer, until soft. Mix ground beef or turkey with some salsa and heat for 45 – 60 seconds. Cut potato open, top with meat and a sprinkle of cheese, and microwave for 30 seconds more or until cheese is melted.

Pasta. Traditional pasta made with white flour generally leaves you hungry again in a matter of a couple hours, unless you include some meat that will stick with you. Today's whole grain pastas contain more fiber and will keep you full longer. Although they cost a little more than the white kind, you can save money by skipping the meat. You'll notice a taste difference with most of the whole grain brands, but Barilla Plus is a good choice if you want the taste of regular pasta with the benefits of extra fiber and nutrition. Another option is to mix regular pasta with **spaghetti squash**—a vegetable that turns into a spaghetti-like substance! See the [quick food prep tips](#) below to find out how to cook it, then mix it in with regular spaghetti for added fiber and fullness. Another way to make pasta a better meatless meal is to sautee some frozen vegetables in oil, sprinkle with garlic salt and grated parmesan cheese, and toss them in with your noodles.

Pizza alternative. Tortillas are highly versatile things! Spread a tortilla with some spaghetti sauce, shredded mozzarella cheese, and your choice of toppings. Some healthier options are mushrooms (canned are fine and

REALLY cheap), peppers, onions, spinach (can be thawed from frozen so you don't have to keep the fresh stuff on hand), turkey pepperoni, black olives, and canned pineapple. Place in 400° oven for about 3 – 5 minutes—until cheese is melted. *QUICK!*

Breakfast burrito any time of day. Use the [egg mug](#) concept to cook up the insides—eggs, cheese, and some kidney or black beans. Pile the egg mixture onto a tortilla, top with salsa, and roll it up.

Snack Ideas

Stay out of the vending machines by planning ahead with these snacks!

Popcorn. The ultimate healthy swap when you want something salty and crunchy. Popcorn actually counts as one of the healthy whole grains you hear so much about, and it's full of fiber and good-for-you vitamins and antioxidants. Portion-controlled 100 calorie microwavable bags are an easy way to go, but it gets even cheaper if you buy a jar of kernels and pop them in a sealed paper bag. If you're craving salty, crunchy, AND sweet, try kettle corn varieties or check out these [easy recipes](#) for turning popcorn into something REALLY amazing!

Almonds, walnuts, pistachios, cashews, pecans. Okay, at first glance these may seem expensive, but not when you realize that a little goes a long way. Nuts rate high in both protein and fiber, so ¼ cup (a handful) is all you need fill you up—especially if you have a glass of water to go along with it. That said, KNOW THYSELF! If you can't crack open a can of Planter's without soon seeing the shiny foil at the bottom of the container and wondering how you downed so many, nuts may not be your best choice! They'll cost you too much in \$\$\$ AND calories, so be careful. [Pre-packaging](#) the appropriate portions can help. Also note that salted nuts tend to be more addictive than unsalted.

Peanuts in the shell. Now here's a nut that's less expensive to begin with, and having to work for them a little bit is a natural deterrent to the "That handful was good—I think I'll have another" trap. Studies show that when people leave shells in plain sight while they're eating, rather than tossing them directly in the trash, they tend to eat less. So go ahead and slop up that table to save money and calories!

Pumpkin and sunflower seeds. These are two more great fixes for a crunchy/salty craving, with the bonus of WAY more vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats than a bag of chips. With flavored seeds like ranch, jalapeno, nacho cheese, and chili lime out there, who needs Dorito's?

Peanut butter and just about anything. Half a peanut butter sandwich is great for a snack, or use it as a dip for apples or veggies. They now make portable single-serving containers of peanut butter, although you'll pay more for the extra packaging than you will for a big jar.

Hard-boiled eggs. They're not just for breakfast!

Edamame. Eda-what? *Ed-uh-ma-may*, a fancy word for soybeans. Full of fiber AND protein, and fun to strip out of their shells.

String cheese. A one-ounce stick is surprisingly filling, especially when paired with a piece of fruit or cut-up vegetables. With 8 grams of protein in only 60 calories, it's a great pick!

Yogurt and cottage cheese. These super breakfast choices work just as well for snack time. And sweet yogurt or cottage cheese with fruit *may* work to quell a sugar craving.

A small smoothie. A downsized version makes a great snack and can be a powerful sugar-craving-buster!

Trail mix. Make your own trail mix by tossing together some nuts, high-fiber cereal, raisins or other dried fruit, pumpkin or sunflower seeds, and maybe a shot of chocolate chips or M&Ms for a little fun. Just keep your serving sizes to 1 cup or less since most of the items are calorie-dense.

Applesauce. Can't beat this for cost—just 13 cents/serving! The no sugar added kind is just as delicious as the kind loaded with high fructose corn syrup, especially with some cinnamon mixed in. Applesauce alone won't fill you up very much, so try it with a piece of string cheese or a hard-boiled egg.

Tortilla chips and salsa with black beans. Of course the baked version of tortilla chips will cost you fewer calories, but sometimes they just don't have the taste you're after. The key here is to eat some salsa with your chips. If the brand you buy doesn't contain black beans, throw some in to fill you up quicker! Salsa is an excellent way to get the veggies you know you should be eating, and the dipping process can deter you from blowing through ¾ of the bag of chips in one sitting. To be REALLY safe, portion out your chips before you start eating and put the bag away. It should work at least *half* the time ☺

Hot chocolate made with milk. Tackle a sweet craving with hot chocolate. The bags of chocolate-flavored sugar that you pour into hot water won't fill you up, but you can make them a little healthier AND filling by using milk instead. Just microwave the milk for about 90 seconds and add the packet—preferably a lower calorie

type since you'll be getting extra calories from the milk. For an even healthier choice, mix 2 packets of stevia with one heaping teaspoon of unsweetened cocoa powder in a mug, add just a little milk and stir until you have a chocolate syrup, then fill the rest of the mug with milk and stir. Microwave for 90 seconds. If you don't make the syrup first, the cocoa powder will never mix well into the full cup of milk—yuck!

Money-Saving Shopping Tips

1. Try to have a game plan (list) when you hit the grocery store.
2. Store brands often taste just as good as the brand name products—the only difference is price.
3. If you can afford to buy a larger size of a product (e.g., cereal, ground beef, peanut butter), you normally get more for your money than if you buy the smaller size. Example: Individual containers of yogurt are often 50 – 75 cents, but if you buy a 32 oz container, the price per serving drops to about 40 cents.
4. Consider going in with a group of friends for a membership at a wholesale store like Costco, Sam's Club, or BJ's. You can pool your money to buy in bulk and save.
5. Amelia's is a grocery outlet that offers all kinds of food for less. Just make sure you check expiration dates—it's much better for boxed and canned items than milk or produce.
6. Frozen fruits and vegetables are usually less expensive than fresh, but they're often just as nutritious. Fresh produce needs to be picked early to allow for travel time, while fruits and vegetables intended for freezing can be picked at the peak of ripeness.
7. Clipping coupons may be out of the question for you (I know I never would have done it in college!), but now there are websites like www.smartsources.com and www.couponcabin.com that let you easily select and print coupons that really do save you money. It may be worth 10 – 15 minutes to check them out before you hit the grocery store. And who knows—with smart phones, even the printing part will probably soon be eliminated!
8. Life is about balance and there's room for just about anything *in moderation* in a healthy diet. But if half your food allowance goes to useless calories like soda, chips, and donuts, or if you're on a first-name basis with the McDonald's cashiers, it's time to reevaluate where your food bucks are going!

Quick Food Prep Tips

1. **Ground beef or turkey.** Instead of cooking up ground meat when you need it for a recipe, try making it ahead of time and freezing it. When you have about 10 minutes on your hands, place the ground meat in a pan and heat until browned, turning and crumbling it as you go. Drain it on paper towels, then put it in a large plastic freezer bag. Lay it flat in your freezer so you can break off just as much as you need at a time. If the meat's ready to go, you greatly increase your chance of being able to resist a Pop-Tart dinner in favor of throwing together some tacos, soup, or chili!
2. **Beans.** Beans are an awesome add-in for eggs, soup, chili, salsa, and more, but sometimes you just don't need too many at one time. Open a can, rinse them off, use what you need, and store the rest (flat) in a bag in your freezer for when you need them again. They thaw in less than a minute. To save even more money, you can buy a bag of dried beans rather than the already super-cheap cans. They take a while to prep, but it's a very hands-off process. Soak them overnight in a big pot full of water, then boil them for about 1 ½ hours the next day until softened. You don't need to watch over them, so you can just set a timer and do something else until they're done. Then store them in a BIG freezer bag (flattened), and you'll be supplied for months!
3. **Boiling eggs.** Simply place eggs in a pot, cover with water, and boil for 20 minutes. To make the shells come off easier, soak eggs in cold water after they're done. You may need to drain the water off and replace with fresh cold water several times until the eggs no longer heat up the water.
4. **Spaghetti squash.** Slice in half with a sharp knife and scoop out the seeds with a spoon. Put a small amount of water on a dinner plate and place the squash flat-side down on the plate. Microwave for 10 minutes. When done, scrape the inside of the squash with a fork and it will come out like strands of spaghetti!
5. **Pre-packaging portions.** It's easy to overdo portions of nuts, crackers, cookies, trail mix, etc., and you can easily down 400 – 600 calories in a flash when you keep reaching back down into that box of Cheez-its. You can buy a lot of these items in portion controlled servings (like 100-calorie packs of

cookies or snack packs of chips), but the extra packaging means extra expense. The cheaper way? Buy a box of zip-top plastic bags for under \$2, and portion out your snacks ahead of time according to the serving size on the package.

Recipes

If you want more great ideas on healthy things to eat, sign up for a free newsletter at www.hungrygirl.com. You'll get daily emails with tips and tricks for swapping out standard high-fat, high-calorie American fare with healthier alternatives that taste just as good! Here are a few Hungry Girl recipes for starters.

Egg mugs <http://www.hungry-girl.com/newsletters/raw/1256>

Popcorn + chocolate <http://www.hungry-girl.com/biteout/show/2120>

No-cook recipes <http://www.hungry-girl.com/weighin/show/2065>

Under 5 minute meals <http://www.hungry-girl.com/show/episodes/under-five-minutes>