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Cheap chow

Eating inexpensively but healthy in a recession

By Shelbia Brown Staff Writer

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It's official, the economy has taken a downturn. It may be difficult to find recession-friendly foods, especially when feeding a larger family.



Click to enlarge Inexpensive foods that have a long shelf life are handy in a recession. Be sure, however, that those foods are healthy.

Daniel Giles/TimesDaily

And hitting a fast-food joint's dollar menu may be a super saver but fails on the healthy side.

According to the Nielson Co., some good, healthy foods made the cut were packaged seafood, dry pasta and pasta sauces.

For many, eating healthy will not be a recession sacrifice. And it shouldn't be. But healthy food junkies, especially the organic ones, know how expensive foods can be to fit their dietary needs. Some other recession-friendly foods include Ramen noodles, franks and beans, fruits, dry beans and rice.

TheDailyBeast.com calls classic casserole the new re-occurring dish for the recession. Depending on size, it can serve more than the typical one or two people. Instead, it can be stretched out to serve as many as six people.

Sherry Campbell, of the Shoals Culinary Center, said cutting food costs can put more money in the pockets. She offered a few tips for "stretching" food and making it last longer.

Campbell said foods such as rice and soups are both healthy and cheap. Even buying local produce from farmer's markets in your area can save a lot of money. Produce that is shipped is priced higher because of fuel and packaging costs.

Some surveys have proven that more American's are turning toward off-brand labels of food.

"You just have to taste generic brands to see how it tastes," Campbell said.

But she said she urges consumers to be careful when buying low-cost generic brands. Some brands skimp on what are considered to be unnecessary ingredients when that degrades the products quality.

She also said making your own chicken or veggie stock from food scraps can save money.

Canned foods, Campbell said, are looked down upon for health reasons, but in moderation they can come in handy.

"I try to use as little as I can," she said.

According to healthcastle.com, one should not only check the price of foods but also the nutrition facts on the product. The Web site gives healthy eating and weight-loss tips. The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 required that foods have this information on the labels in order for consumers to be educated and aware of the foods they are eating.

Campbell said making a detailed budget before grocery shopping can save money. She said naturally people tend to spend more and purchase unnecessary items when shopping aimlessly.

"That will really stretch your food budget," she said.

Campbell advised buying cheaper meats when preparing a full meal. Buying a roast instead of a loin can be much cheaper. She said when planning a meal with an expensive meat, buying cheaper sides like low-cost veggies can offset the cost of the meat.

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