

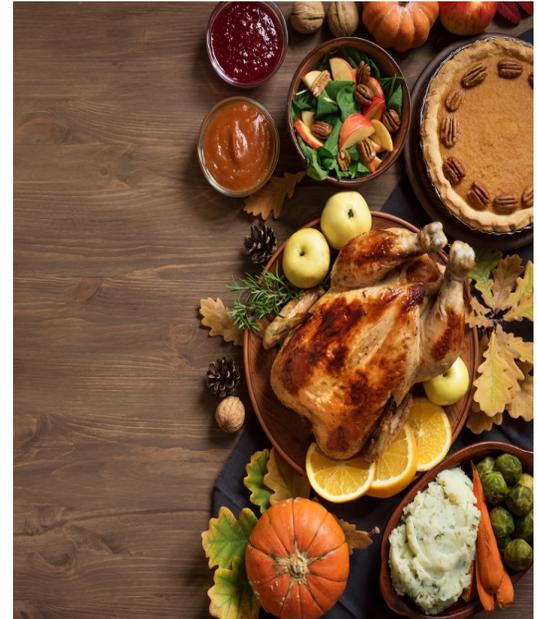


Getting Ahead of the Holiday Meal Cost Finding Your Recipes and Preparing Your Kitchen - Part 1

The holiday season is approaching! You may be planning an in-person or virtual celebration for friends and family in one big group or in smaller gathers. Regardless of the venue, it's never too early to start holiday meal preparation. If left to the last minute, meal planning can be a challenge no matter if you're having a dinner for one or ten. Planning your menu in advance allows you the opportunity to be sure all the favorite dishes are included and spend smarter. You will shop more efficiently, use less of your SNAP dollars, and decrease costs by avoiding unnecessary purchases. Sticking to your menu items and buying in advance over the course of several grocery trips will spread out the expense and lower the impact on your monthly food budget.

Getting Ahead of the Holidays Meal Cost, is a six-part series that will run from September to mid-November. About every two-weeks we will release a new topic in the six-part series. Each blog will include strategies and suggestions to save you money at the grocery store and make your holiday meal planning headache free. The series will Over the six-week series we will cover:

- 1- Finding Your Recipes and Preparing Your Kitchen
- 2- Canned Goods
- 3- Dry Goods
- 4- Spices
- 5- Frozen Items
- 6- Perishables



You will want to refer to your recipes often over the next few weeks. Begin by pulling out your favorite recipes and organizing them by breakfast, entrees, sides, and dessert.

Your Kitchen Staples

Let's get started by reviewing what we have on hand. We all have certain spices that are family favorites. Take an inventory of these items and make a note of those which are running low. Don't forget oils and non-sticks sprays. if you don't know what meal you'll be preparing, compiling a list of these staples will avoid purchasing the same item twice. Your list will save money and remind you to use items on hand first, utilizing them before they expire.

Cooking Utensils

Have you ever reached for a cookie sheet only to find it is warped? Now is the perfect time to purchase any needed replacement pots, pans, baking sheets, or muffin cup. Don't forget other baking, cooking, and serving supplies, such as parchment paper, aluminum foil, cutlery, and table linens (cloth or disposable). Keep in mind that non-food items such as these are not SNAP eligible so you cannot purchase them with an EBT card. For low-cost items, consider local dollar stores or borrowing from a friend or family member who will not be using their pots/pans.

Shopping the Bargains and Sales

Where you purchase certain items can make a difference in how far your food dollars stretch. Consider which stores offer the best value for the items in your recipes. The best buy on spices and for canned goods might be two different stores. With each blog topic in the series, check grocery store advertisements and value store offerings selecting the store that offers the best combination of price and suitable product.

Watch for specials through grocery store loyalty card programs such as Food Lion's MVP or Harris Teeter's VIC; loyalty cards can lower the food bill at check-out. Paid membership warehouses such as Sam's Club, Costco, or BJ's are also great options if you are looking to purchase bulk items. Members of these warehouses are allowed to bring one guest when shopping. If you aren't a member, ask a friend or family member if you're able to join them when shopping. Let's kick off holiday meal planning right by finding the best deals. Happy Shopping!

The Getting Ahead of Holiday Meal Cost series is sponsored by the *More In My Basket (MIMB)* Program. Visit morefood.org for the complete series or to contact the *More In My Basket* staff.