



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

A coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles

www.eatrightmontana.org

February 2009

Dear Colleagues,

Happy Valentine's Day and welcome to the second packet of Eat Right Montana's 2009 campaign. This year's theme - *Going Green: Simple Steps for Montana Families* - is a perfect fit with today's top-of-mind concerns. In this issue, we weave together the current economic and nutrition recessions with everyday tips for accomplishing three goals at the same time: **saving money, staying healthy, and reducing waste.**

While tough economic times affect all Americans in one way or another, they are especially hard on the food budgets of middle and low income families. Experts are beginning to consider what the recession may mean for US eating habits and health status, especially with the booming sales of so-called 'value meals' at fast food outlets like McDonald's. Nutritionists worry that, in trying to save money, people will consume more empty calories and fewer healthful foods (www.reuters.com/article/GCA-Economy/idUSTRE50805W20090109).

The shift away from nutrient-rich choices (www.nutrientrichfoods.org/) toward foods and beverages higher in fat and sugar is likely to exacerbate the existing "nutrition recession." Many Americans, especially young children, are already **undernourished** - as a result of consuming too many calories and too few nutrients. The good news in these grim times is that there are dozens of tried-and-true ways to continue eating right when money is tight.

The upbeat and practical resources in this month's packet feature some excellent oldie-but-goodie tips for you and your clients. We hope that you find uses for the following:

- **Media Release - Eco-nomical Solutions to Save Money, Stay Healthy, and Reduce Waste**
- **Healthful Eating - Tasty Ways to Enjoy Nutrient-Rich Value for Your Produce Dollar**
- **February Recipe - Spicy Lentil and Tomato Soup** (from Timeless Foods, Conrad, MT)
- **Active Lifestyles - Fun Ways to Get Strong without Spending a Fortune**
- **Eco-Tips - Easy Ways to Reduce Kitchen Waste and Save Money**

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions. Although we have an outline for each packet, we are eager to incorporate your input whenever possible. Just send your thoughts along to me at EatRightMT2000@gmail.com - and remember, past issues of **Healthy Families** and other ERM materials are available at www.eatrightmontana.org/.

Dayle Hayes, MS, RD

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Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families 2009



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MT Department of Public Health & Human Services

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Eco-Nomical Solutions: Save Money, Stay Healthy, Reduce Waste

There is no doubt that Montanans are facing some tough economic decisions. Just talk to one of the legislators meeting in Helena this month! Whether you are a lawmaker working on a balanced state budget or a family trying to trim your weekly expenses, our current economy has just about everyone looking for ways to spend less. In terms of nutrition and health, experts are worried that the economic recession could make a bad situation worse for Big Sky families.

“Even before food costs started to climb and people began losing jobs, we were talking about a nutrition recession,” says Lynn Paul, EdD, RD (registered dietitian), and Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist at MSU in Bozeman. “Americans already consume too many calories and too few nutrients. In an economic crunch, they may choose more cheap foods that are high in fat, sugar, and calories. Fast food ‘value meals’ are a terrible nutritional value for your food dollar.”

As frugal shoppers have known for years, it is possible to minimize food costs while maximizing nutrition. It just takes attention, time, and, most of all, planning. Many resources for eating well on a budget are available, including *Eating Right When Money Is Tight* (www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/outreach/pdfs/making-ends-meet.pdf) from USDA.

According to Dr. Paul, the MSU nutrition education team can provide lots of practical resources as well. “Our family and consumer science specialists and county agents are real experts at putting healthy food on the table at a reasonable cost. We offer classes for low-income families, children, and seniors, as well as recipes and tips available to everyone on our web site (www.montana.edu/nep/index.htm).”

Here are three tried-and-true ways to enjoy real value meals - the old-fashioned kind you make at home:

- **Before you go shopping, make a plan:** Set aside a weekly planning time, like Saturday morning, preferably after you have eaten. Using supermarket sales flyers (available in newspapers and at the store) and what you already have on hand, plan meals and snacks based your family’s schedule. Involve other family members as much as possible in the process.
- **In the store, ignore the fancy displays and stick to your list:** The purpose of food displays is to tempt you into making impulse purchases. Always use a shopping list (based on your plan) and stick with it. The most nutrient-rich bargains will be on the outer edge of the store (produce, meat, dairy, and bakery), as well as in the canned and frozen food aisles.
- **As you shop, read shelf tags and price stickers carefully:** The fine print on these informative resources can help you make smart decisions between competing brands and sizes of products. While bigger sizes and store brands are usually less expensive per ounce, this is not always true. A few cents on every item can make a big difference at the cash register.

“Smart nutrition shopping strategies can help you be a ‘greener’ consumer at the same time that they save you money,” notes Dr. Paul. “Careful planning means that you will throw away less uneaten food. Buying in bulk and in larger sized containers means less packaging to throw away. This can actually be a win-win for your health and the environment.”

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm

5 Tasty Ways to Enjoy Nutrient-Rich Value for Your Produce Dollar

As food budgets tighten, you often hear people claim, “it’s more expensive to eat healthfully.” Smart shoppers know to look for fresh fruits and vegetables **IN SEASON** and **ON SALE**. They also know that there are some super healthy produce items that are as inexpensive as they are tasty. Check out these deals next time you shop!

1. DRIED BEANS, PEAS, and LENTILS

Beans are a vegetable? You betcha! Legumes (black beans, kidney beans, pintos, chickpeas, red or green lentils, split peas, etc.) do double duty. They are the only foods that count in two groups: veggies AND protein (lean meat/beans). Canned beans are convenient and quite inexpensive, but the real bargains are in dried beans. All it takes is an overnight or quick soak (see package), a couple hours to cook, and they’re perfect for soup, chili, tacos, burritos, or yummy baked beans.

2. YAMS and SWEET POTATOES (different names, basically same veggie)

Packed with fiber, potassium, vitamins A, C, and phytonutrients, these tasty tubers are nutrition powerhouses. (Popular in African and Caribbean cuisines, true yams are a totally different, but equally nutritious vegetable.) More nutrient-rich than white potatoes, they can also be baked, mashed (a little soft cheese adds tangy creaminess), and turned into delicious baked ‘fries’ (slice, toss with a little olive oil and your favorite seasonings, then bake for 30 minutes in a 425 degree oven).

3. FROZEN FRUITS and VEGETABLES

When fresh produce prices are high and money is tight (like in the winter months), you can feel great about serving frozen produce to your family. Research shows that the frozen veggies (broccoli, green beans, corn, peas, etc.) contain similar levels of vitamin C, fiber, magnesium, and potassium as fresh. Frozen berries and other fruit are also nutritionally similar to fresh. Buy a large bag, use what you need, then keep the remaining produce frozen with a tight seal on the bag.

4. CANNED FRUITS and VEGGIES

Canned produce can also be convenient, economical, and healthful (always recycle the cans!). Modern canning locks in nutrients at peak freshness. Due to the absence of oxygen during storage, canned fruits and vegetables remain relatively stable and nutritious until they are served. Look for veggies without added salt and fruit canned in 100% juice. Canned tomatoes are a deliciously inexpensive way to enjoy tomato flavor and nutrition during the cold winter months.

5. DRIED PLUMS (AKA PRUNES) and OTHER FRUIT

Dried fruit is another nutrient-rich option when fresh is too pricey. Rich in vitamin A and several B vitamins, dried fruits also have plenty of minerals, like potassium (and even iron in some cases). Choose brands with no-added sugar and buy in bulk when you can. Easy to store and with no peels to worry about, dried fruit makes a great on-the-go snack - by itself or mixed with nuts and seeds. Dried fruit can also be added to salads, pancake mixes, muffins, rice dishes, and casseroles.

MORE RECIPES FOR EATING RIGHT WHEN MONEY IS TIGHT

For recipes from A-to-Z from Montana Extension, go to www.montana.edu/nep/approvedrecipes.htm

For a huge collection of creative recipes using canned fruits and veggies, visit www.mealtime.org/



Spicy Lentil and Tomato Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp. sunflower oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup celery, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. cumin seed, crushed
- 1 lb. ripe tomato chopped or 14. oz. can chopped tomato
- 1/2 cup red lentils, such as Timeless Foods Petite Crimson
- 5 C. vegetable stock
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Low fat yogurt and freshly chopped parsley as garnish

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan and cook the chopped onion and celery gently for 5 minutes until translucent.
2. Stir in garlic, ginger and cumin.
3. Add tomatoes and lentils.
4. Cook over low heat for about 3 minutes.
5. Stir in the stock. Bring to boil, lower heat and simmer gently for about 15 minutes, until lentils are soft.
6. Salt and pepper to taste.
7. Puree the soup in a blender or food processor. Return to a clean pan and reheat gently.
8. Serve in heated bowls, and with a heart-shaped swirl of yogurt and sprinkling of chopped parsley.

YIELD: 6 1-cup servings

Ideas/Substitutions

- For a southwestern flavor, sprinkle with chopped cilantro instead of parsley.
- For added crunch, top with a few croutons or sunflower seeds.
- Serve with hearty whole grain bread or rolls - and a green or fruit salad.
- Substitute olive oil for sunflower oil. Light sour cream can also be substituted for the low fat yogurt.
- For the vegetable broth, use homemade or canned broth (regular or low-sodium). Beef or chicken broth may also be used.

Nutrition Analysis

Serving Size: 1 cup

Calories: 161

Total Fat: 3.2 g

Calories from Fat: 18 %

Saturated Fat: 0.4 g

Trans Fat: 0.0 g

Total Carb: 29 g

Dietary Fiber: 3.3 g

Sodium: 301 mg

Protein: 7.2 g

Calcium: 60 mg

Iron: 2.7 mg

Recipe Source

Adapted and used with permission of

Timeless Foods, Conrad, Montana

www.timelessfood.com/

5 Fun Ways to Get Strong Without Spending a Fortune

Green fitness is a way to improve your health while minimizing your environmental impact. These tips combine green principles with frugality: saving money, getting strong, and reducing waste - all at the same time. You may want to consider other possibilities that are not quite as cheap or as green, such as buying used equipment. Most in-home fitness stuff (treadmills, stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, gym sets, etc.) is never used again after the first six months, so it ends up in garage sales, online classified sites, and second-hand sports stores. Look for good quality items (read consumer reviews first) and test them carefully to make certain they are still in working order.

1. Think of your dog as a treadmill with fur.

Chances are that your dog could use an activity upgrade as much as his or her owners! Getting serious about dog walks will be good for you and good for your pet. If you are both out of the shape you would like to become, start slowly and take it easy. A couple of shorter, vigorous walks (20-30 minutes) may be more effective and easier to fit into your day. No dog at home? No problem! Walk a friend's furry little treadmill - or contact your local animal shelter or pet rescue group.

2. Become a regular library patron.

No, reading is not a fitness activity (unless you read while pedaling a stationary bike). However, libraries are an incredible resource for information that gets used over and over again (a great way to reduce waste). Check out your local library for fitness information - DVDs, CDs, tapes, books, and magazines - which are all free (a great way to save money). To turn a library visit into a serious strength builder, walk or bike to the library with your books and other items in a backpack.

3. Sign up for a class from Extension or your parks department.

Terrific fitness bargains are offered through Montana State University (MSU) Extension and your community recreation department. Classes, such as yoga and belly dancing, as well as MSU's *Strong Women* and *Small Steps to Health and Wealth*[™] (descriptions at www.msuextension.org/nutrition/) are offered for as little as \$20-25 for several weeks. For the current offerings, call, visit, or go to the web site of the parks and rec department or county office of MSU Extension.

4. Turn your home into a thrifty gym.

It's no fitness myth: You can get strong at home without fancy equipment or expensive club memberships. All it takes is a minimal investment (hand weights, a mat, and maybe a stability ball - remember to check garage sales) and some items around the house, such as chairs and a couple of stairs. For simple instructions, use the *Strong Women* programs, online at www.strongwomen.com/, in a book from your library, or in an MSU Extension class. Minimal cost, maximum strength!

5. Get good with a resistance band.

Resistance bands are probably the most versatile, flexible, and portable fitness equipment on earth. They take up minimal storage space and use no electricity (making them more environmentally-friendly than exercise machines). Best of all, they are cheap: less than \$10 for one band or under \$20 for a set with several sizes. Most bands come with simple instructions or you can find dozens of videos for strengthening every part of your body on YouTube (www.youtube.com/).

5 Easy Ways to Reduce Kitchen Waste and Save Money

If we want a healthy environment for our families and our earth, we all need to learn smart waste management skills. The most effective way to manage waste is to create less in the first place. This is especially true in tough economies, when prices for recycled materials fall dramatically. Reducing kitchen waste is more environmentally sound than reusing or recycling waste (even composting). The good news about our waste reduction tips is that they will save you dollar\$ (like that the old saying *'waste not, want not'*). Most importantly, you don't have to start reducing everything at once. Begin with one new strategy and move onto another one when you are ready.

1. Consider food packaging carefully.

As you shop for groceries and kitchen items, check out the amount of packaging around various brands and sizes. Buy products with the least amount of plastic, paper, cardboard, and metal surrounding them. Choose the type of packaging that is easiest to recycle in your community. Reduce waste and save money by avoiding prepared and highly processed foods. These products usually have excessive amounts of packaging, as well as a high cost for the amount of food you get.

2. Buy only what you need.

One of the biggest sources of kitchen waste is spoiled and uneaten food. Although much of this may be compostable (an excellent way to recycle), you can reduce waste and save money by only buying the food that you can consume before it goes bad. The three best tips for buying what you need are: (1) Plan meals and snacks before you go shopping. (2) Make a list (using sale flyers from the store) and stick to it. (2) Never ever go food shopping when you are hungry.

3. Buy the biggest size you can use.

Buying in bulk - and choosing the largest size - is generally an excellent way to both reduce waste and save money. You can use many different strategies to take advantage of large sizes and bulk buys. Share a case of fruit, a block of cheese, or large bag of sweet potatoes with friends, neighbors, and family members. If a food can be frozen, divide it into the size that your household will usually eat - and freeze the extra in reused, but well-sealed, plastic containers or freezer bags.

4. Get deliciously creative with leftovers.

Making the most of every bit of food makes great financial sense and a big difference in reducing garbage. After any meal, imagine the delicious possibilities for all the little odds-and-ends. Pieces of meat, fish, and poultry can go into a sandwich for lunch or a soup pot for dinner. Small amounts of meats, eggs, veggies, or potatoes can turn a can of soup into a meal - or add some real flavor to a future casserole. Leftover rolls and bread can be crushed into crumbs and frozen for later use.

5. Ditch disposables, throttle the bottle, and lug a mug.

In our throwaway culture, disposable dishes and utensils became the norm. Green consumers are turning the tide with simple steps, like 'just saying no' to plastic forks when getting takeout food. Join the millions of thrifty water drinkers who are returning to tap water. Reusable water bottles and coffee cups save you money (many coffee shops give discounts if you bring your own). Reducing the amount of plastic and paper in your life also helps save our earth - every day!