

# Student food shopping:

## Top tips for staying healthy on a budget!

Microwave meals and frozen pizzas can start to make you feel tired and emotionally exhausted. Why not start as you mean to go on and find a diet that was both cheap and nutritious?

If there's one thing that almost every student misses, it's a proper meal. In fact, [46% of freshers miss their mum's cooking more than anything else from home](#). However, with many students figuring out weekly budgets and frequenting discount isles, [almost three quarters of those in the UK say they are eating three good meals a day](#).

It is possible to whip up a meal that will keep both your stomach and your bank account full and healthy!

### Here are some tips:



**Fresh vegetables:** Someone always leaves a week-old broccoli shrivelled and yellow at the back of the fridge. But don't be put off buying it in the first place, as most vegetables can either be bought fresh and put in the freezer, or come already frozen. Frozen vegetables can be incredibly cheap, last a long time and they retain their nutritional value, so stock up.

**Buy meat from the butchers and look for cheap cuts:** Butchers sometimes do cheap deals, and the produce is fresh. If you're prepared to take a little more time with your cooking, buying cheaper cuts of meat is a great way to save money. Choosing a cheaper cut of meat, such as braising steak, shin or shoulder, doesn't mean missing out on a tasty meal. Slow cooking gradually breaks down the fibres in cheaper cuts, giving great taste at a lower cost.

**Shop in the evening for reduced prices:** This is when supermarkets sell food that's close to its sell-by date, such as bread and fruit, for a reduced price. It shouldn't be avoided though, as often it can be frozen and eaten later. Every student should learn the difference between a use-by date, which is a health warning, and a best-before date, which is usually just the manufacturer's view of optimum quality. Use your eyes and nose to check – but food that has passed its best-before date is often fine to eat.

**A budgeted weekly shop is cheaper:** Save one day a week to do a big shop. Plan your meals so you don't get tempted to overspend. Stock up on all your food groups in one trip and you'll save money.

**Reduce waste and freeze food:** Writing a meal plan to make sure you use up the ingredients you already have is a great way to save money. Online services like [Supercook](#) or [BigOven](#) suggest recipes for whatever is in your fridge or cupboard. Freeze

what you have left over to enjoy another day – make sure you reheat your food thoroughly.

**Write a shopping list:** Draw up a weekly meal plan using up ingredients you already have and make a shopping list of any missing items. Try not to shop when hungry. People who shop when hungry are more likely to spend more, especially on less healthy foods, such as high-fat and sugary snacks.

**Waste nothing:** The average family with children throws away almost £60 of good food every month. Be strict about buying only what you'll actually eat. Plan your meals so that all ingredients on your list get used. Freeze any unused food. Food storage bags and boxes will come in handy.

**Eat leftovers for lunch:** Cook extra portions for your evening meal so that you can have the leftovers for lunch the next day. Any leftovers can be frozen for another day. Eventually, you'll have a freezer full of homemade ready meals on tap. Find out how to use leftovers safely.

**Buy frozen:** Frozen fruit and vegetables are underrated. They come pre-chopped and ready to use, are just as good for you (try to avoid those with added salt, sugar or fat), and are often cheaper than fresh varieties. Frozen vegetables are picked at the peak of freshness and then frozen to seal in their nutrients. Get tips on freezing and defrosting.

**Try cheaper brands:** You could save money by buying cheaper brands than you normally do. There's not always much difference between value and premium ranges. Give it a go and let your taste buds be the judge, not the shiny label. Find out how food labels can help you make healthier choices.

**Eat more veg:** Meat and fish are typically the most expensive food ingredients on a shopping list. How about adding vegetables to meat dishes such as casseroles to make your meals go further? Or try a few vegetarian meals during the week to keep costs down?

Make it fun by joining the thousands of people who regularly take part in meat-free Monday.

**Cook with pulses:** Pulses, such as beans, lentils and peas, are some of the cheapest foods on the supermarket shelf. These pulses are low in calories and fat but packed with fibre, vitamins and minerals and also count towards your 5 a day. Use them in dishes to replace some of the chicken or meat, such as a chilli con carne with kidney beans or a chicken curry with chickpeas.

**Freeze leftover bread:** Bread is one of the most wasted household foods. Reduce waste by freezing bread, preferably in portions (for convenience) and when it's at its freshest (for taste). Store bread in an airtight container (such as a freezer bag) to avoid freezer burn.

**Know your kitchen:** Know what's in your kitchen store cupboard, fridge and freezer. You may find you've got enough ingredients to make a meal! Plan your week's meals to include ingredients you've already got in and avoid buying items you already have. Check use-by dates to make sure you use up ingredients before they go off.

**Cook from scratch:** Save money by cutting back on takeaways. Preparing and cooking your own meals is generally cheaper than buying a takeaway or a ready meal, and

because it's easier to control what goes in to your dish, it can be healthier. Try weighing or measuring out staples such as pasta and rice when cooking to stay in control of portion size and reduce waste.

**Compare pre-packed with loose:** Fruit and vegetables sometimes cost more pre-packed than loose. Check the price per weight (for example £/kg). Stores know that consumers want to buy in bulk, and so they mix it up: sometimes the packed produce is cheaper, sometimes it's more expensive.

Also, pre-packed isn't always the freshest and you may end up with more than you need.

**Cut down on luxuries:** If your regular shopping basket tends to include fizzy drinks, crisps, snack bars, biscuits and cakes, try trimming down on these non-essential items. Many of these are high in sugar and fat so you'll be doing your waistline as well as your bank balance a favour. They can also contain a lot of salt. Think about cheaper and healthier alternatives – such as sparkling water and fruit juice instead of cola, or fruit and plain yoghurt.

**Beware of BOGOF offers:** Special discounts such as buy-one-get-one-free (BOGOF) deals can offer good value, but be careful: only buy items you actually need and are likely to keep and use – tinned or frozen fruit and veg or rice and pasta are a good example. Markdowns on perishables at the end of the shopping day are another way to bag a saving – but make sure the item gets used before the use-by-date and doesn't go off sooner than expected.

**Shop online:** Price comparison websites, such as [mysupermarket.com](http://mysupermarket.com), let you select a basket of products and then choose the cheapest supplier. The price differences can be significant. Unlike going to the shops yourself, you'll know how much you've spent before going to the till, which can make it easier to stay within budget.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/eat4cheap/Pages/cheap-food-shopping.aspx>

<https://healthyeatingonastudentbudget.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-survive-student-basic-recipes>

**Website to check out :** <http://www.eatingonabudget.co.uk/>