

# Seven healthy food swaps on a budget

Making the switch to **healthy eating habits** is possible, and tasty, even on a budget. It doesn't require a total life change or a ridiculous amount of money to spend on fancy groceries. Even little choices can make a big difference in increasing your overall health. Here are seven simple food swaps- **on a budget**- to help promote a healthy diet full of nutrients and prevent common health issues.



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# 1. Instead of soda, try tea



## Soda

Sweet, bubbly sodas can lead to some serious **health issues**. Regular *and* diet sodas leave you feeling hungry, causing you to eat more. Soda has been linked to **weight gain, diabetes, headaches, and even fatigue**. All that being said, soda can be okay in moderation. Think of it like a special treat instead of an everyday drink.

**Average cost:** \$1.19 per 16 oz. can



## Tea



Looking to replace the caffeine or flavor you get with soda? You can get an **energy fix** with tea, but without the sugar and calories. Need something sweet? Tea can be sweet with just one tsp of sugar- 8x less sugar than soda! If you want to keep that extra energy away from your kids, there are plenty of decaffeinated teas. Tea has been shown to **lower cholesterol, boost your immune system, and promote heart health**.

**Average cost:** \$0.07-0.25 per bag, which makes 16 oz. of tea



# Try it!

Tea can be enjoyed hot, cold, sweetened, unsweetened, and in **many different flavors**.

- Explore different types of tea like green, black, and white as well as fun flavors like peach, blueberry, cinnamon, and mint.
- Add a tea bag to a cup of boiling water and let it steep for the amount of time directed on the tea box for a **warm, comforting drink**.
- Leave tea bags in a pitcher of water overnight in the fridge and serve it over ice the next day.
- **Save time by making a pitcher** of tea to drink throughout the week.

## 2. Instead of sugary granola bars, try fruit



### Granola bars

Granola, energy, and nut bars are often marketed as healthy snacks, but many of them are **not as good for you** as they let on. Some have additives and preservatives and are heavy on corn syrup and sweeteners. Some “healthy” snacks can even have **as much sugar as a candy bar!** There are plenty of healthy bars out there- look for options with 5 grams of sugar or less and at least 5 grams of protein.

**Average cost:** \$0.30-\$1 per bar



### Fruit



Fruit is foolproof and portable. It can be eaten as is, has no packaging to mess with, and **only has sugars easy for your body to process.** Fruit is high in fiber and essential vitamins and minerals and low in calories. There are a diverse range of fruits that are easily available and offer a wide **variety of flavors.** Frozen fruits, no-sugar-added applesauce, and dried fruits also make great snacks. Eat fresh fruits that are in season to get the fullest flavors and best prices.

**Average cost:** \$0.30-\$1 per fruit

# Try it!

Fruit eaten raw and whole is delicious, but what if you want to **mix it up** a little?

- Add nut butter to apples and bananas for a **hearty snack**.
- Add fruit to yogurt or oatmeal instead of (also often sugary) granola.
- Blend frozen fruit and yogurt into **smoothies**.
- Make trail mix in bulk and save money. Combine bulk sunflower seeds, nuts, and dried fruit for a portable snack that lasts weeks.
- For a **sweet treat**: grill apples or peaches and top them with cinnamon, or freeze grapes and eat them as popsicle bites.

### 3. Instead of meats, try other proteins



#### Meats

Meat is a delicious but **costly** part of any diet. Processed meats like sausage, hot dogs, jerky, canned meat, lunch meat, and bacon have high levels of salt and preservatives, which **increases the risk** of heart disease, high blood pressure, and obesity. Even non-processed meats have a high environmental toll to be considered. These foods should be eaten in **moderation**.

**Average cost:** \$3-7 per pound



#### Other proteins

Foods like beans, whole grains, and eggs are typically **healthier than meat** while also providing the nutrients and proteins found in meat. They can be purchased without preservatives, additives, and artificial flavors and colors- just be sure to check the packaging. Any of these alternate proteins can easily be given **delicious flavors**- experiment with spices and sauces to find your favorite.

**Average cost:** \$0.60 per can or cup,  
\$0.12 per egg



# Try it!

- Replace the meat in your tacos, pasta, and casseroles with **kidney, pinto, or black beans** by adding a can or two of rinsed beans and your favorite seasoning.
- Make your burgers with **half meat** and half beans.
- Kick it up a notch by **adding lentils** to any of the above. Dried lentils are prepared just like rice and pack 18 grams of protein per cup.
- Swap out some (or all!) of the meat in your next sandwich with an **egg!**

## 4. Instead of sugary cereal, try oats



### Sugary Cereal

Many cereals are marketed as a healthy start to the day. This is sometimes true, but more often than not, cereals are **full of sugar** that leads to a quick energy burst followed by a **mid-morning slump**. Children's cereals are often the most sugar-filled, commonly getting 30-60% of their calories directly from sugar. Cereal isn't awful- just check to make sure it's actually a healthy choice by looking at sugar, fiber, protein, and calorie content.

**Average cost:** \$0.70-0.80 per serving



### Oats

We're talking about real oats, the kind that come in the cardboard jar. Oats are **full of vitamins and minerals** and release energy slowly so that you stay fuller longer. They lower cholesterol, stabilize blood sugar, and help lower blood pressure. Oats can help digestion and have 6 grams of protein plus 4 grams of fiber, while cereal may have only 2 grams of protein and 2 grams of fiber. Unlike cereal, **you control the amount of sugar** and flavoring in oats, so you can make them delicious without being unhealthy.

**Average cost:** \$0.20 per serving



# Try it!

In under 5 minutes, Oats can be eaten in several delicious, creative ways.

- Simple:** mix a half cup quick oats with one cup of water, milk, or almond milk and microwave for two minutes.
- Overnight:** oats can also be left overnight in the liquid of your choice for a cold oatmeal in the morning.
- Fun, healthy flavors:** try mixing in peanut butter, cocoa powder, plain yogurt, or cinnamon and topping with nuts, sliced fruit like apples, bananas, or peaches, or a pinch of brown sugar.
- To-go breakfast jar:** mix one half cup oats, one cup liquid, and one half cup frozen berries in a portable container and leave overnight in the fridge. Grab and go, or microwave for a hot meal.

## 5. Instead of white side dishes, try green



### White sides

We may not realize it, but a lot of the popular sides we eat are white: potatoes, rice, bread, and pasta. While tasty, these foods provide **little nutrition** and contribute to high-blood sugar, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. A direct alternative to these sides would be sweet potatoes, brown rice, or whole-grain bread or pasta. However, side dishes provide a great opportunity to eat a serving of vegetables...

**Average cost:** \$0.30-0.40 per serving



### Green sides



Green sides made of kale, broccoli, spinach, and collards are great low carb, low calorie alternatives to white side dishes. These greens are full of vitamins and minerals as well as fiber, which keeps you **fuller longer**. Cooking green side dishes can be a great way to find new, easy dinner-time staples that cut fat and calories and add in **heart-healthy nutrients**. Remember: Frozen or canned veggies are equally as nutritious as fresh, and sometimes less expensive.

**Average cost:** \$0.35-0.45 per serving

# Try it!

Making green sides is simple, just takes a few ingredients, and can be done in as little as 3 minutes.

- 3 minutes microwaved:** microwave canned or frozen veggies, add some seasoning, and dig in.
- 3-10-minute skillet greens:** wash fresh greens, rinse canned, or use frozen. Heat olive oil in a skillet and add the greens plus your favorite seasonings. Cook until tender.
- 20-40 minutes roasted:** preheat oven to 400. Chop fresh veggies into 1-2-inch squares. Toss with oil and seasoning. Roast on a sheet pan.
- Grandma's collard greens recipe** can also make for an amazing, healthy side! Just keep an eye on the butter.

There are countless ways to turn these vegetables into delicious side dishes- get creative and find some new go-to recipes!

## 6. Instead of white potatoes, try sweet potatoes



### White potatoes

Mashed, baked, casseroled, or as a salad, white/Russet potatoes are a popular side dish. We know them as vegetables, but nutritionally they're classified as a **starch**. White potatoes can quickly increase blood sugar levels. Though they may be filling at first, they can lead to **energy slumps** and cravings shortly after a meal. White potatoes can provide important vitamins and minerals, so they should not be excluded from your diet; they just **should not be eaten in excess**.

**Average cost:** \$0.62 each



### Sweet potatoes



Sweet potatoes are digested slowly and keep you **fuller longer**. They have more vitamins and minerals than white potatoes and are nutritionally considered to be a **vegetable** as opposed to a starch. Sweet potatoes are also a great source of the antioxidant beta-carotene, which has been associated with improving lung and skin health and helping prevent cancer. Try making a dish with sweet potatoes instead of white potatoes every once and a while to get a serving of vegetables.

**Average cost:** \$0.94 cents each

# Try it!

You can cook sweet potatoes just as you would any potato.

- Bake them** in the oven or microwave.
- Toss them** in a bit of olive oil and spices and roast them in the oven.
- Boil them** on the stovetop and mash them or add them to a casserole.
- Add them** to salads, on top of grains, baked into fries, or even sliced, baked, and eaten with avocado and cheese on a sandwich.
- Make them sweeter** by adding a little brown sugar, a few marshmallows, and nuts. Try them as dessert!

In any form, they can be topped with cinnamon, nuts, and your favorite seasonings.

## 7. Instead of white grains, try colorful, whole grains



### White grains

White rice, white bread, and white pasta get their color (or lack thereof) from having the most nutritious parts of the grain removed. This causes them to have very **few essential nutrients**. Eating white grains quickly increases blood sugar content and has been linked to an increased risk of diabetes. These types of grains can be **eaten in moderation** as part of a healthy diet, but consider trying more colorful options for a healthier meal base.

**Average cost:** \$0.05-0.20 per serving



### Colorful, whole grains



Whole wheat bread and pasta as well as grains like brown rice, quinoa, millet, and amaranth contain all parts of the grain and thus the nutrients that go with them. They have more **fiber, vitamins, minerals, protein, and antioxidants** than their white counterparts. These grains have been associated with lowering blood sugar, helping control weight, and reducing the risk of heart disease. They're an **easy and tasty swap** for white grains at any meal.

**Average cost:** \$0.10-0.30 per serving

# Try it!

- Whole wheat bread can be directly substituted for white **bread** on any occasion: rolls, sandwiches, toast, you name it.
- Pasta:** Next time you're boiling noodles to serve with sauce, try whole wheat pasta instead.
- Rice:** Grains like brown rice, quinoa, millet, and amaranth can be cooked just like rice! Simply bring water or broth to a boil, add the grain, and simmer until the water has been absorbed. Sometimes they even come in microwaveable bags.
- Grains can be used as a base for **salads and bowls**. Add veggies, meat or beans, and spices, or cook in a crock pot with broth for a protein-packed **soup or stew**.
- You can also top cooked grains with a bit of seasoning for a healthy **snack or side dish**.