

How to cook healthy meals at home while on a budget

Let's defeat the virus. Keep on eating healthy, be physically active, wear your face covering, stay 6 feet apart, keep your spirits up.



KATHY KOLASA

family of four with healthy food items obtained from a grocery store that are cooked at home. If you were to break that down further that would be a cost of \$2.41 per person, per meal.

Now when you are at the grocery store the next great question is "What should I buy?" My rule of thumb is that you want half of the items in your grocery cart to be either fruits and vegetables and the rest split between protein and grains. You can pick and choose what you like but the ultimate goal is to have a good variety in your diet with five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, with preferably more vegetables than fruits.

One huge strategy to save money on fruits and vegetables is to buy them whole. You should try not to buy fresh fruits or vegetables that are pre-prepared. The reason is because of the huge price mark-up that comes from processing the food. For example, from a simple search on Walmart's website, I found the average price of 1 pound of whole red onion to be 49 cents while 1 pound of diced red onion is \$4. That is a substantial increase in spending that could easily be saved by preparing the food at home.

About protein, I find chicken and fish to be the least expensive and healthiest animal products, however, plant-based proteins can be a healthy alternative to animal protein that typically are a fraction of the cost. For example, one pound of black beans at Walmart

costs roughly \$1.30 while a pound of chicken can range from \$4-\$8. That again is a huge reduction in price and contributes toward a healthy diet.

Important items to avoid purchasing are sugary drinks and bottled water. According to data from ECU's Pediatric Healthy Weight Clinic, patients report spending on average \$425 per year per child on sugary beverages and bottled water. To eliminate this cost, drink water. You can get a pitcher that filters water for about \$15. Add some flavoring if you prefer.

Some additional strategies to follow at home include having three meals a day without overindulging in second portions, especially at dinner. Rather than having a second portion, save it for tomorrow's lunch, then you can get two meals out of one. And for hunger in between meals the best way to avoid expensive unhealthy snacking from sources such as vending machines is simply to plan healthy snacks throughout your day.

One of my favorite snacks is apple slices with peanut butter, which is nutritious and filling. Portion out nuts into small bags for an easy nutritious snack.

It is impossible to name all the things one can do to shop on a budget and maintain a healthy diet, but I hope some of these strategies and tips help you on your journey to a healthier lifestyle without burning a hole in your wallet.

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It's time for a dip

Let's be honest. Life has been a little stressful of late. In times of anxiety and uncertainty, some self-care is warranted. I am not talking cleanses and fasts, folks, I am talking indulgences, because, well, we deserve it.



LYNDA BALSLEV

When our sheltering days are clocked by changes of clothing from morning PJs to home-office athleisure attire, to a return to PJs (wash and repeat); when our weekly schedule requires setting an alarm to remember that it's in fact a Monday, or to clarify that the weekend follows Friday and, sadly, not the aforementioned Monday; when we realize that the entire last year has atrophied any semblance of learned social skills (no small feat for introverts), and our voracious consumption of screen time has effectively canceled any parental authority in managing that department — it's important not to judge. Rather, it's time to be kind to ourselves, to embrace comfort in the form of simple pleasures, and to mark the end of yet another sheltered day with non-anxiety-provoking rewards (and cue the moment it's OK to change back into our PJs).

Which leads me to this bowl of dip. (As I said, simple pleasures.) I confess that I called this dinner when I made it (no one in my family objected), and I regret nothing. In my defense, it's a homemade dip. It conjures childhood memories of additive- and salt-packed instant onion dips, while, in these modern times, it's made from scratch with real ingredients. It's also easy to put together, risking no inflection in your anxiety level.



LYNDA BALSLEV/TASTEFOOD

Triple onion dip.

And since I am feeling a little lighthearted these days, I have even provided two ways to make this dip. The first is a basic onion-packed dip, and the second is the same dip dressed up with a little extra bling, because, as mentioned, we deserve it. And while it's not an evening at the theater or a festive party (so 2019), the bling adds a tiny hint of sparkle that we can enjoy on a Tuesday — oops, Thursday — night in our PJs.

Triple Onion Dip

Active Time: 10 minutes
Total Time: 40 minutes plus cooling time
Yield: Makes about 1 1/2 cups
Ingredients:
 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
 1 large yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced
 3 shallots, halved and thinly sliced
 2 shallots, white and green parts divided, thinly sliced
 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
 1/4 cup cream cheese, softened
 1 cup sour cream
 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
 1/2 teaspoon salt or to taste
 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper or to taste, plus more for garnish
Optional bling:
 1 to 2 teaspoons drained jarred horseradish
 Salmon roe for sprinkling
 Dill sprigs for garnish
Steps:
 Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, shallots and white scallions. Cook over medium heat until very soft and tinged golden in spots, about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the lemon juice, then remove and cool to room temperature. When cool enough to handle, chop the onions and transfer to a bowl. Whisk the cream cheese until light and smooth, then stir in the sour cream, Worcestershire sauce and garlic powder to blend. Mix in the onions, salt and black pepper, and taste for seasoning. Garnish with the green scallions if not adding the optional dill.
Optional: Mix in 1 to 2 teaspoons drained jarred horseradish, to taste, with the onions. Garnish with the salmon roe and dill sprigs.
 Serve with potato chips, pita chips or crudites.

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Zay's Place food truck is a place of taste, variety

BY CHRISTINA RUOTOLO
 Hot Dish

A few weeks ago, I introduced you to the wonderful world of food trucks and over the next few months we are going to sink our teeth into great food and stories behind the food trucks that call Greenville home.



Let's get started with Zay's Place, which has been in operation for two years. They are a full-service truck offering a wide range of American, soul, seafood, and Jamaican cuisine made fresh daily. They also offer home-cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner options.

The breakfast menu features biscuits piled high with bacon, sausage or ham with cheese and egg, or waffles and French toast. Other items include a luscious ham and cheese sandwich and the jumbo lump crab cake platter with two eggs and one breakfast side. No, you did not read that wrong, they serve crab cakes for breakfast. Now that is something, I may wake up early for.

The lunch and dinner menu is a feast for the eyes and senses,

from barbecue ribs, burgers, hot-dogs, chicken and waffles, curry chicken, fish, shrimp, baked spaghetti, turkey barbecue, subs and big, beautiful salads like the strawberry pecan or apple walnut. There seems to be a food for any mood and many of the items have a Jamaican influence, from authentic beef, shrimp, or curry chicken Empanadas, and an oxtail plate.

For seafood, they have a sea full of choices including fresh succulent shrimp and grits, the famous Shrimp po'boy, crispy fried fish plates and crab cakes. Side dishes include macaroni and cheese, coleslaw, collards, cabbage, candied yams, peas and rice, green beans, and even on occasion the Mexican street corn on the cob. All dinner platters come with two sides and a



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Chicken salad is one of the foods featured on the lunch menu.

corn muffin, and for lunch you can make your meal a combo by adding fries and a drink.

"Everything we do is from the heart," Owner and operator Isaiah Turner said. "We offer the finest ingredients and flavors to keep you satisfied from sunrise to sundown. Our food truck has the saying to 'Let your tastebuds



Above is the shrimp po'boy sub at Zay's Place.

rate us,' and you will like it so much you'll come back for more," Turner said.

Before the food truck, Turner worked in law enforcement, mental health and retail, so first and foremost he knows people. He has been cooking since he was a young kid, so he was ready to bring his family foods and favorite dishes to the masses.

To start my food truck tour, I

went straight for a crowd favorite, the homemade chicken salad served on a bed of lettuce with sliced tomatoes with crackers. This fragrant and creamy chicken salad had all the makings for a perfect Southern lunch with chunks of chicken mixed with chopped celery, egg, sweet pickle with light spices. Spread it on a butter cracker and pair it with their homemade strawberry lemonade and it's like sitting at a picnic on Sunday with your best friends.

Next, I went big with the Chicken Philly sub. This massive, beautiful sub was savory, earthy, cheesy and warmed up my winter bones. Start with a hoagie roll that is filled with shaved and sauteed chicken, green peppers and onions with melted provolone cheese. In my opinion, anything with melted cheese is going to be good. The sandwich was hearty and filling and so big and wonderful I ate it with a fork. I paired it with homemade macaroni and cheese that had that crispy baked top and cheddar that

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