

Daily Union Article
Saturday, November 21
Managing Holiday Food Costs

Don't let the holiday season bust your food budget. With careful planning and perhaps a bit of creativity, you can make your holiday meals fun, filling, and frugal. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Keep it nutritious – The MyPlate guidelines suggest that half of your plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables. By following this recommendation, you can reduce the amount of meat you need to purchase while making the meal more balanced. Additionally, by adding more fruit and vegetables to your menu, you can reduce the amount of fat and calories in the meal, as a whole. Adding fresh fruits and vegetables ensure that you are providing your guests with the many vitamins and minerals these foods naturally provide. Although fresh fruits and vegetables can be costly at the grocery store, you can avoid overspending by purchasing produce that is in season. During this time of year, consumers will find a variety of apples, pears, pumpkin and yams on sale at their local food mart. Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables that are low in sugar or sodium can prove to be a nutritious and economical alternative to fresh produce.
- Take advantage of sales - Since canned and frozen foods have a longer shelf life than fresh produce, you can stock up during sales and buy things you know you will need for holiday meals. Look for the economy or family size cans or frozen food packages to get the most value for you food dollar. Some families think a holiday meal would not be a feast without ample amounts of meat, my own included. However, the meat dish is typically the most expensive part of the meal. Instead of providing two types of meat, choose just one. To reduce cost, look at different preparation options to help you stay within your budget. Consider buying a large single cut of beef or pork and serve it two different ways. For example, a pork loin can be cut in half so that one part can be baked and sliced for serving while the other half can be used as the meat in a meat and vegetable pot pie. Look for local meats, like beef, ham or turkey, and use recipes that include meat as an ingredient instead of a stand-alone dish. Some grocery stores promote traditional holiday meats through purchasing incentives. They offer coupons or points based on what you have purchase over the last month or year to count toward a “free” turkey or “free” ham.
- Avoid overspending – This is most commonly done with the meat dish. Being aware of the sales in grocery stores is a great start to limiting the amount of money you spend on the meal. However, being conscientious of the quantity

you prepare can also help with the food budget. Don't get overly concerned about buying enough food for everyone. Trust that your guests will pace themselves and enjoy the great feast you have provided.

- Plan early – The most important factors for a successful holiday meal on a budget are planning and preparation. Making a plan for your holiday meal can save money and time. Determine how much you want to spend and begin creating a menu with that budget in mind. Include coupons, food stamps and WIC vouchers as part of your budget. Look at the grocery store ads carefully before you leave for the store. Most stores have their weekly sales ad posted online the night before they go into effect. By looking them over in advance, you can make a list that is both health and budget friendly. Make a shopping list that is built around what is on sale and the food you need for the meal. Don't buy "extras" with the money that you save, unless they will be for your holiday meal. Adding a few things in your cart that aren't on your planned list can cost you valuable food dollars at the cash register. Sticking to the plan and the shopping list will help you avoid this common pitfall.
- Take inventory – Open your cabinet and pantry so you know what you already have on hand to avoid buying unnecessary ingredients at the store. Pull out the recipes for the menu items you plan to prepare and check off what you already have in your cabinet or pantry. Especially look at the spices, herbs, and seasonings you will need. These can add to your food expense if you purchase what you already have on hand.

Holiday traditions and time with family are less stressful when you avoid putting yourself in a financial pinch. Start with budgeting for the holiday meals to ensure your resources and energy are being used wisely through the giving season. For more information on budgeting for healthier meals, contact me at the Geary County Extension Office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

Check out this healthy twist to a holiday classic!

Cinnamon Apple Cranberry Sauce

Serves 12

Ingredients:

- 2 cups cranberry juice
- 1 1/2 cups sweetened dried cranberries
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 apples, washed, cored and diced, with peel on
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch

Directions:

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, stir together the cranberry juice, dried cranberries, cinnamon and sugar. Bring to a boil, and let cook for 5 minutes.
2. Add apples and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cranberries have softened and apples are tender, about 5 minutes.
3. Pour 1 cup of the liquid from the apple mix into a small bowl. Whisk in the cornstarch. Slowly add the cornstarch-juice mixture back to the cranberry-apple mixture in the pan, stirring constantly. Cook for an additional 5 minutes.
4. Remove from heat and pour into a serving bowl. Refrigerate until thickened, about 30 minutes. Serve as a side dish for meat or poultry. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Recipe adapted from the Food Network

Nutrition Information: 1 serving (94g) equals 110 calories, 0 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 5mg sodium, 29g carbohydrate, 2g fiber, 0g protein.

