If the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how you are eating or shopping, you are not alone. Over 80 percent of Americans have made a change in the food they eat or how they prepare it in 2020. Among the most common changes is eating more meals at home. This, along with higher food prices, may be straining your food budget. Below are a few ideas to help stretch your food dollars.

**Take advantage of seasonal specials.** Food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables is generally less expensive when bought in season.

**Buy in bulk, if possible.** It’s usually cheaper to buy food in bulk, like family chicken packs and large bags of potatoes or frozen vegetables. Before you shop, see if you have freezer space to store the extra.

**Buy less expensive cuts** **of meat.** Marinate before cooking or use a cooking method (such as braising or slow cooker) to make meats more tender.

**Shop with a list.** Using a list helps prevent impulse buying and forces you to plan meals for the week.

**Shop after eating and shop alone, when possible.** When family members are along, you tend to buy more; and everyone buys more if they shop hungry!

**Eat vegetarian** **once or twice a week.** If you make “Meatless Mondays” a routine, it will expand your meal options and save a few bucks.

**Check for store brands.** Most stores offer their own brand of products that cost less than name brands. You may not notice any difference in quality or appearance.

**Read sales fliers.** Usually released midweek, sales fliers can be found at the store’s entrance, in the newspaper, or on the store website.

**Prepare your own food.** Convenience foods like frozen dinners, pre-cut vegetables, and instant rice, oatmeal, or grits are more expensive than those made from scratch. For help with low-cost recipes, here are a few ideas:

* <https://spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu> (English)
* <https://eatfresh.org/home> (Spanish, English, and Chinese)
* <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/myplatekitchen> (Spanish and English)