Eating healthy – for you and your budget

A healthy diet doesn't necessarily equate to an expensive diet. While it's easy to opt for a meal at your favourite restaurant or overspend on groceries, a little advanced planning can help you stretch your food dollars. Here are some action steps for a healthy nutrition plan:



Plan a week's worth of meals. When planning your meals, consider how you might make use of leftovers. For example, if you plan on roasting a whole chicken on Sunday, you could reserve some chicken and serve shredded chicken tacos the next night.

Prepare your own convenience foods whenever possible. Convenience foods come with a cost. Not only do canned goods tend to cost more than freshly prepared foods, they also tend to have more fat and sodium than their home-cooked counterparts. Instead of buying canned green beans, for example, wander over to the produce aisle and buy fresh ones.

- **Grow your own produce.** Planting your own vegetable garden is fun and rewarding, and you get to eat the fruits of your labour. While you can certainly spend a great deal of money starting a garden, it's also possible to grow your own fruits and veggies on a budget. For example, container gardening requires only a large pot, soil, and seeds.

- **Before you throw it away, freeze it!** All kinds of foods can be frozen and saved for later including leftovers, raw and cooked meat, bread, and fresh fruits and vegetables. If you regularly find yourself tossing out uneaten leftovers, you're throwing money away. If this is the case, freeze the extra portions and use them on those nights when you don't feel like cooking. By doing this one week out of every month, you could cut your grocery bill by up to 25 per cent!

- **Switch brand names for generic.** Generic brands are usually less expensive than their brand-name counterparts. Compare prices to make sure you're getting the best value for your money. For example, if a brand-name item is on sale, it may be cheaper than the store brand.

- **Control your impulses.** You know your weaknesses: chocolate, cookies, ice cream… so before you head to the grocery store, write out a shopping list and vow to stick to it. Picture yourself happily walking past your favourite items in favor of healthier choices. If it helps, have a healthy snack and drink a glass of water before you go grocery shopping to curb your hunger.

- **Eat out less often.** An entree, side dish, and half of an appetizer at national full-service restaurant chains contain an average of 1,495 calories, 28 grams of saturated fat, and 3,512 milligrams of sodium. If you add a beverage and half of a dessert, that single restaurant meal would represent your entire day's allotment of calories (based on 2000 calories per day, the widely accepted number for adults). In addition to the increase in calories and sodium, the expense of eating out can also add up; the average cost of a mid-range restaurant meal with wine or beer is estimated to be between $15 and $25 plus tax and tip.

In today's world, where time is precious and convenience is essential, a quick stop at a drive-through is rapidly becoming the norm. However, it's never too late to change your eating habits. Fast food might be cheap, but the tips above will also keep you within your budget while eating healthy.