



## **Cost-effective cooking tips**

Below is a list of ways to keep costs to a minimum when cooking for you and your family. Not every suggestion will be useful or realistic for everyone, but they are a good starting point to think about where you might be able to cut costs.

Everyone is different and everyone has different skills and different amounts of time in which to get things done. The important thing is to do what you can - but always be realistic about what you can actually do... and don't feel bad about the things you don't - it would be overwhelming to do everything possible all of the time.

**Plan ahead:** Try to plan meals for the week ahead and think about all the meals as connected to help in buying ingredients. This can help cut down on food waste as you can use all of an item you buy e.g a whole broccoli in two meals rather than having half leftover that ends up thrown out. It can also allow you to buy in bulk which can be cheaper. It might also help you to cut back on impulse buys when you are out shopping.

**Batch cooking:** This goes side by side with many of the other tips. By cooking twice as much of a meal (think bolognese sauce, casseroles, pasta bakes) and freezing half not only do you save on the costs of the energy used to cook it, but can also save money from bulk buying - plus you have a ready made meal for another night.

**Your freezer is your friend:** Your freezer can be used for more than storing the frozen food you buy. Freeze your batch cooked meals and any leftovers that can be used later in another dish. Freeze food near its use-by date to save it going off; prep and freeze fruit that's starting to go soft - you can use it later in desserts or to make jam. Veg that is starting to look sad can often be prepped and frozen to use later.

**Don't waste anything:** Easier said than done, but any food saved from the bin is saving you money (and the planet). Many of the other tips here are about avoiding waste so think about what (if any) bad habits you have and which ones would help you avoid them.

**Flexible cooking:** By being flexible with your cooking you can save money in a couple of ways. First, you can use any leftovers or odds and ends to save throwing them away and second, you can buy cheaper ingredients to replace more expensive ones. Think about swapping out some meat for beans, lentils or mushrooms or using whatever veg you have hanging about in your freezer rather than the specific one it says in a recipe. It's amazing what veg you can hide in a tomato sauce if you blend it in or chop it really small!

**Love your leftovers:** Leftover meat or veg can be used in a curry or risotto. Nearly any leftovers (or odds and ends) can go in a soup but you could also think about ways to repurpose your leftovers meals to create a whole new dish. You could add kidney beans and chilli powder to leftover bolognese to make a chilli or leftover roast veg could be tomorrow's delicious pizza topping - even leftover fish and chips can be turned into fishcakes!

**The right equipment:** When it comes to saving on energy costs it's important to think about the most efficient way to cook. Usually cooking in the oven is the most expensive, then the hob and then the microwave or slow cooker. Most casseroles can be cooked on the hob

rather than an oven and many meals can be cooked in a slow cooker if you have access to one. There are also lots of guides to cooking meals in the microwave - not only does it cost less but it's usually really quick too! Air fryers are also efficient as they are like little ovens that only heat a small face where the food is rather than a whole oven.

**Use the whole oven:** If possible try to use the whole oven so you are not using energy and money heating up empty space. You could cook two meals at once and reheat one the next day or cook a dessert at the same time as your main course (though not if one is really strong smelling like fish or something really spicy).

**Store-cupboard cooking:** Although eating fresh fruit and vegetables is really important, these are often the things that end up going off and getting thrown away. So try not to overbuy fresh food and make the most of the cheap and durable, but still healthy, options that will keep for ages. Think tinned, dried and frozen food: tomatoes, beans, chickpeas, frozen peas and other veg are all really versatile, healthy and often cheaper too. Tinned oily fish like sardines or tuna are cheap and nutritious and can be used in pasta bakes, fishcakes, cheats paella and many other dishes.

**Make from scratch** (but be realistic): Cooking from scratch is often much cheaper and healthier than buying pre-made but it does take more time so you need to be honest with yourself about what's possible. Making your own pizza from scratch is quite easy but much more time consuming than chucking one from the shop in the oven, but pasta with tomato sauce is quick and easy to make and will taste much better. Making bread at home is also easy but takes time, but homemade tortillas take 5 minutes to make and 3 minutes to cook.

**Eat less meat:** This one is generally true as meat tends to be the most expensive part of a meal. Be flexible and use less, or find delicious veggie recipes that don't use any at all. A great approach is to bulk out the meat element of a dish with a cheaper veggie alternative.

Experiment with halving the meat in any dish and replacing with lentils, beans or other pulses - you get to keep the delicious meat flavour but it's cheaper and often healthier as well. Try some of these substitutions with suggested recipes from

<https://tinyurl.com/ClimatarianRecipes>

Replace half your beef with mushrooms: Mushrooms cost 50% less than beef mince a saving of up to £1.50 for a meal for 4 - [Climatarian Burgers](#)

Apple with pork: Apple costs 40% less than pork mince, a saving of up to £1 per meal for 4 - [Pork meatballs](#). You could use pumpkin instead of apples for an even bigger saving of about £2 for a meal for 4!

Replacing half your beef mince in a beef bolognese with lentils would save about £1 for a family meal.

A saving of £1-2 every meal really adds up - and your helping the environment by eating less meat too!