We all know that the price of food has gone up. Each year it seems that food takes a bigger bite out of my budget. But not everything is created equal when it comes to rising food prices.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, food prices have increased by almost six percent over this past year. Recent research shows that meats, poultry, fish and eggs have risen over six percent during the year, but non-perishables have actually leveled out or gone down just a little in price.

The experts say that the cost of meats, seafood and produce is on a long-term upward course, so we can expect more of the same in the future. The global market for food has much to do with this rise in prices. The number of middle class consumers in other economies is increasing, and these consumers are changing their diets. As people begin to earn more money, they tend to purchase more high-quality meats and produce, so prices for these foods go up throughout the global food system.

Staple items such as flour, rice and grains have actually lost their market share, which has kept the prices lower on these non-perishable items. So, if you are trying to spend less at the grocery store, take advantage of this trend by changing your family’s purchasing habits. Here are some easy ways to take advantage of these less expensive items.

Consider meatless meals. My daughter makes a habit of meatless Mondays. She cooks dry beans or peas, rice, grains or potatoes for the main dish in her meals. Pinto beans, white bean soup, baked potatoes with all the toppings, rice and bean burritos, or lentils make for an economical and healthy main dish.

Purchase meat, but stretch it. Meat loaf and meatballs are perfect ways to make ground meat go farther by adding oatmeal, cracker crumbs or bread. Think about adding rice to
your ground meat and make it Asian, Mexican or Cajun depending on the seasonings and sauces you use with it.

Reduce the size of servings. Most of us eat too much meat. We will eat a 12- or 16-ounce steak and never even bat an eye. A serving of meat is considered three to four ounces, which is a piece of meat about the size of the palm of your hand. Reducing the amount of meat you are serving to your family will save you money, not to mention the calories.

Buy at a reduced price. What didn’t sell in the market yesterday will be at a reduced price today. I make a habit of hitting the reduced-price bin before I check out the regular offerings. Items are always 30 percent off and sometimes 50 percent off. Pay close attention to the overall costs, though. Often it is the higher-priced items that are in the bin. If you purchase an item from the reduced-price bin, be sure to cook it quickly or freeze it for long-term storage.

Buy cheaper cuts. This week I found I could buy a chuck steak for four people for the same amount of money as one sirloin steak, which is only enough to feed one person. The chuck steak just requires more moisture when cooking, as in a crockpot, or a longer cooking time on top of the stove.

Don’t waste foods. We spend more for perishable foods, so take care of what you buy. Watch your food and make sure to cook it before it goes bad. They say that we throw away 25 percent of the food that comes into our house. Plan ahead and pay attention to your food supply. Use it before it must be discarded.

Food prices are going up, but eating well doesn’t have to break your budget.

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