



# Extension News Column

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**Re:** Pinching Pennies column

March is nutrition month. It is the time that we remember how important it is to choose nutrient-dense foods for our diets. Do you think that it is too expensive to eat a healthy diet? Good choices can be made at all levels of expenditures. You just have to make the best choices.

Here is a “Top 10” list of frugal foods that combine great taste with a nutritious punch, all for a minimum cost. All of the frugal foods on this list are versatile — try them for breakfast, lunch, supper and snacks.

1. **Apples and bananas.** A perfect on-the-go snack, both apples and bananas are naturally portable. Eat these satisfying and sweet nutritional powerhouses raw or baked, or add them to salads, desserts and baked goods.
2. **Beans.** Full of antioxidants, dietary fiber and protein, canned beans cost about 34 cents per serving. Dry varieties that you cook yourself cost even less at about 14 cents a cup. Keep them on hand to pack into brown bag lunches and to make quick suppers.
3. **Brown rice.** With a slightly nutty taste, brown rice is a whole grain. It is more nutritious than white rice. Serve as a side dish at breakfast or as a snack with cinnamon and milk, or add to casseroles and soups. Brown rice takes longer to cook than white rice. So plan ahead. Cook a large pot of brown rice, repackage it in smaller amounts, and freeze. These smaller amounts can be easily reheated in the microwave.
4. **Canned tomatoes.** Canned tomatoes make a great base for countless main dishes, dips, sauces, soups, stews and chili. Tomatoes are rich in vitamin C and lycopene. Buy them without added salt, if possible.
5. **Canned tuna.** A versatile addition to sandwiches, salads and casseroles, tuna is high in protein and vitamin D, and low in calories and fat. Those who have canned salmon, choose that instead, particularly if it is home canned — great bargain and great nutritional choice.
6. **Eggs.** Eggs are high in protein and low in cost. Boiled, fried or scrambled, eggs cook quickly, so they’re perfect for breakfast, lunch or supper. For variety, try French toast, huevos rancheros or egg salad. At 18 cents per egg, that’s a lot of good nutrition for a small cost.

7. **Fat-free milk.** A natural convenience food, skim milk offers a healthy dose of vitamin D, calcium, protein and potassium. Serve skim milk with meals and snacks, and use in soups, smoothies and desserts. A one-cup serving costs a little more than 20 cents.
8. **Kale.** At about a dollar a bunch, kale is one of the least costly green vegetables you'll find. A quick and easy way to use kale is to serve it hot after pan-frying with garlic and a small amount of vegetable oil. You can also steam it and add to pasta salads, or as a topping on homemade pizza. Plant a row of kale this summer in your garden. It grows well in the interior.
9. **Potatoes.** White potatoes and sweet potatoes are satisfying and high in dietary fiber, vitamin C and potassium. Bake, boil, roast, pan fry or oven fry them, or add to casseroles or soups. Sweet potatoes are particularly high in Vitamin A, providing nearly four times your daily requirement in one serving.
10. **Rolled oats.** At just 20 cents, one cup of cooked oats is a heart-healthy whole grain with 4 grams of dietary fiber. Cook oats with fruit for a breakfast or snack, add them to baked goods, or use them to "stretch" the ground beef in meatballs and meatloaf.

Good nutrition is important and can be purchased at a bargain price, if you make careful choices.

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