**How to Keep Your Grocery Budget on Track**

Groceries are one of the biggest fluctuating expenses. They are also a necessity. It can be hard to budget for food because there are so many variables: how often you eat out, which restaurants you go to, what meals you make, how much food goes to waste, and more! It’s easy for your grocery budget to spiral out of control. Here are some steps to help keep your budget in check.

*Problem: You don’t have time to cook.*

Some days it’s inevitable. Your family is going in so many directions that you simply don’t have time to cook! When you are crunched for time rushing between obligations, you don’t have time to cook a meal, and before you know it, your family winds up at a fast food chain.

*Solution: Anticipate those busy days and combat them with a slow cooker meal, or individual servings everyone can heat up.*

Look ahead in your calendar and try to plan for these days. Maybe you don’t have time to cook something and eat it at home, but can you throw something in the slow cooker so it’s ready when you need it? If you freeze meals, try freezing some in individual containers, so family members can heat them up one at a time if everyone is running in different directions.

*Problem: You never have the ingredients you need on hand.*

The family is home and you have just enough energy to finally be able to cook a meal! You’ve been so busy lately that you’d really like to sit down for a meal at home. That being said, you’ve been so busy it’s been awhile since you went to the grocery store for anything other than essentials. Now you’re looking at mismatched ingredients that you’re not sure what to do with. You are missing ingredients for all your family’s favorite meals. Now, at dinner time, you don’t have time to go to the store to buy ingredients and then get back and cook a meal, so it looks like going out is your best option, and resolving to get to the grocery store soon.

*Solution: Smarter grocery shopping.*

While running out of ingredients is inevitable, combat this happening frequently by stocking up on ingredients your family uses often. Add a few people pleasing recipes in your family’s rotation that are made almost exclusively with non-perishable items, that way you always have a few options if you have an unexpected opportunity to cook at home. This can range from soups, pastas, or even an emergency supply of frozen pizzas.

*Problem: You cook so irregularly, and your schedules are so hectic that food winds up going bad.*

You had the best of intentions when you bought those bananas, apples, yogurt, carrots, and more! But you constantly find yourself throwing away molding bread, produce, and miscellaneous groceries you find in the back of your fridge. As much as you want your family to eat healthier, you can’t justify throwing out this much food--and money--all the time.

Solution: Get more organized, both in your food storage and in your food selection.