



7-Day Budget-Friendly Cooking Challenge



CHALLENGE DESCRIPTION:

Cooking at home isn't just great for your health—techniques. **Research** shows that cooking at home not only helps reduce overall food costs but also encourages healthier eating habits by giving you full control over ingredients and portion sizes. Additionally, it helps minimize food waste, **a growing concern** that costs households hundreds of dollars annually. With simple recipes and smart shopping strategies, this challenge proves that eating well on a budget is easier than you think!

Why Budget-Friendly Cooking?

- **Health Benefits:** Home-cooked meals are often lower in calories, sodium, and unhealthy fats compared to restaurant and takeout options.
- **Financial Benefits:** Cooking at home can save up to 50% compared to eating out regularly.
- **Sustainability:** Utilizing ingredients wisely reduces food waste, saving money and benefiting the environment.
- **Convenience:** Meal prepping saves time, reduces decision fatigue, and ensures you always have something healthy on hand.

Some Budget-Friendly Staples

Cooking at home on a budget starts with smart shopping and building a pantry stocked with versatile, cost-effective staples. Ingredients like **rice, pasta, and oats** are affordable and serve as the foundation for countless meals. **Canned goods**, such as beans, tomatoes, and tuna, are long-lasting and provide protein and flavor at a fraction of the cost of fresh meats. **Frozen vegetables and fruits** are not only budget-friendly but also nutrient-dense and convenient, as they eliminate waste by staying fresh for months. Fresh **seasonal produce** like potatoes, carrots, and apples is often cheaper and more flavorful than out-of-season options. Investing in **eggs, flour, and basic spices** allows for a variety of homemade meals, from breakfasts to baked goods. Additionally, buying in bulk, using store-brand items, and planning meals to repurpose leftovers (like roasted chicken turning into soup or tacos) can stretch your food budget while keeping meals delicious and diverse.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY COOKING

THE CHALLENGE

- Commit to cooking one budget-friendly meal each day for seven days.
- Stick to affordable, versatile staples like beans, rice, seasonal vegetables, and frozen proteins.
- Use the recipes below for inspiration and adapt them to your taste and dietary needs.

Tips for Success

- **Shop Smart:** Buy in bulk, choose seasonal produce, and look for store-brand items to save money.
- **Plan Ahead:** Write a shopping list and stick to it. Avoid impulse purchases to stay within budget.
- **Maximize Versatility:** Choose ingredients that can be used in multiple meals (e.g., rice, beans, and frozen vegetables).
- **Batch Cook:** Prepare larger portions of recipes like soup or stir-fry and store leftovers for quick meals.

SAMPLE RECIPE: Budget Baked Sweet Potato and Black Beans

Servings: 1

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 45 minutes

Budget Tip:

- Canned black beans and salsa are affordable and versatile ingredients that can be used in multiple recipes. Sweet potatoes are inexpensive, filling, and packed with nutrients like vitamin A and fiber.

Cost per Serving: Approximately \$3.00, depending on local ingredient prices.

Ingredients:

- 1 medium sweet potato
- ½ cup canned black beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1 tsp olive oil (optional)
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp cumin
- 2 tbsp salsa
- Optional toppings: Greek yogurt, shredded cheese, diced avocado, or fresh cilantro

Instructions:

1. **Preheat the Oven:** Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil for easy cleanup.
2. **Prepare the Sweet Potato:** Wash the sweet potato thoroughly and pat it dry. Using a fork, poke a few holes around the surface to allow steam to escape during baking. Optionally, rub the sweet potato with olive oil for crispier skin.

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- 3. Bake the Sweet Potato:** Place the sweet potato on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 45 minutes, or until it is soft when pierced with a knife.
- 4. Heat the Black Beans:** While the sweet potato bakes, heat the black beans in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add chili powder and cumin for flavor. Stir occasionally and cook until warmed through (about 3-5 minutes).
- 5. Assemble the Dish:** Once the sweet potato is cooked, carefully slice it open lengthwise. Gently fluff the inside with a fork to create space for the toppings.
- 6. Add Toppings:** Spoon the seasoned black beans into the sweet potato. Top with salsa and any optional toppings like Greek yogurt, shredded cheese, diced avocado, or fresh cilantro.
- 7. Serve and Enjoy:** Serve warm as a complete meal or as a hearty side dish.

SAMPLE RECIPE: Lentil Soup

Servings: 4

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 30 minutes

Budget Tip:

- Purchase dry lentils in bulk; they're affordable, high in protein, and last a long time.
- Leftovers store well in the fridge for up to 5 days or in the freezer for 3 months, making this an excellent meal prep option.

Cost per Serving: \$2.89–\$4.09

Ingredients:

- 1 cup dry lentils
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 cups water or vegetable broth
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

- 1. Prepare the Vegetables:** Dice the carrot, onion, and celery into small pieces.
- 2. Sauté the Vegetables:** Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the diced carrot, onion, and celery, and sauté for 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened.

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- 3. Add Spices: Stir in the cumin, paprika, and garlic powder. Cook for 1 minute to release the spices' aroma.
- 4. Add Lentils and Liquid: Rinse the lentils under cold water. Add the lentils to the pot, followed by water or vegetable broth. Stir well.
- 5. Simmer: Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to low. Cover and simmer for 25-30 minutes, or until the lentils are tender.
- 6. Season and Serve: Taste the soup and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper as needed. Serve warm with a slice of bread or a side salad if desired.

This hearty and flavorful lentil soup is a budget-friendly way to enjoy a nutritious, comforting meal that doesn't break the bank!

CHALLENGE COMPLETE!

At the end of the week, take a moment to reflect on your experience. Did you save money? Learn new recipes? Feel healthier or more organized? With these budget-friendly meals, you've proven that eating well doesn't have to break the bank. Keep experimenting, and enjoy the satisfaction of nourishing yourself affordably!

Your 1-Week Challenge

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7



Congratulations on completing the 7-Day Budget-Friendly Cooking Challenge

The journey of wellness is ongoing, and each step, no matter how small, is a victory to be celebrated. Keep pushing forward, embracing each day as an opportunity to live your best life.

