



How to reduce food costs this winter

The rate of food poverty in the UK is currently among the worst in Europe. The severity of this worrying trend was exposed by the pandemic and now, as prices soar and more and more families across the country are being pushed into poverty in the current cost-of-living crisis, the situation is likely to get even more difficult.

With winter approaching, many families are likely to face the added challenge of additional strains on household budgets as they start use more fuel to heat our homes and cook meals.

We know that it is much harder for people to afford to eat as well as they used to, or in many cases, to eat at all and that many families are actively looking for ways to save money on food, so here are a few helpful ideas for reducing the amount you spend on food and saving money that you can share with families:

Shopping

There are a few simple ways that families can reduce how much they spend when food shopping, some of which may seem obvious, but can make a real difference to the final bill.

Planning your menu in advance by making a list of exactly what you need (and sticking to it!) can help reduce unexpectedly high bills at the checkout. Taking out cash if you can so that you are not tempted to 'stick it on the card' and worry about it later can also help,

preventing you from accidentally going over-budget.

Taking the time to consider exactly what you are buying can also help dramatically reduce the cost of a weekly cost. For example:

- Replacing branding goods with own-brands items – there is often very little (if any) difference in taste but often a big difference in price.

- Using 'value' ranges and 'wonky' vegetables to make big savings – for example, a bag of wonky carrots in Morrisons is 39p and a 500g bag of Asda 'smart price' pasta is 29p.
- Trying to buy food in season – it usually means it's at least a bit cheaper.

If you can afford the upfront cost, planning your meals in advance, making the most of special offers (such as buy one, get one free; three for the price of two etc) and then batch cooking and freezing different meals each week is also often a cheaper way to shop over the longer term.



Spot a bargain

Shops and supermarkets use a range of different tricks and methods to encourage us to spend more. Knowing what these are, and how to avoid falling for them, can be a very easy way to reduce your food spending.

For example, don't just pick the goods that are at eye height on the shelves, as cheaper products are often placed higher or lower shelves where we won't automatically look. Comparing the cost per unit weight labels on the shelves can also often result in a real

difference in price – never assume that bigger is more expensive. Knowing how and where bargains can be found can also help you cut costs. For example:

- Going to the supermarket an hour before closing time when lots of items are often significantly reduced to clear them at the end of the day.
- Using loyalty cards to get discounts on foods (for example, having a Tesco Clubcard can get an almost 50% discount on some items).
- Checking the free monthly magazines that many supermarkets publish: these often have discount vouchers in them.
- Comparing supermarket prices to ensure you're getting the best prices: there are a number of websites such as trolley.co.uk that help you search by item and do comparisons across all the major stores
- Using coupons to get money off a whole range of food item: the website moneysavingexpert.com has a [comprehensive list](#) that is regularly updated.

Make the most of online

If you have access to the internet, shopping online is a great way to see exactly how much your food shop is costing as you shop. It also makes it easy to find special offers and enables you to substitute for a cheaper option if the bill is climbing too high, and stops you being tempted by in-store displays (or your children seeing something they want at the check-out!).

If you can shop online, get a delivery at out of hours times – this can minimise or remove the delivery charge. Also, don't forget check out the 'new' products and 'offers' tabs, as they often have introductory offers on new items or seasonal stock.



Cooking

While knowing how to shop smart is vital to helping to manage food-related costs, what you do with the food once you have it is equally important. Below are a few tips on approach to cooking that can help reduce your outgoings this winter:

Make the most of vegetables: Make soups and stews with lots of vegetables in large batches and freeze the leftovers in individual-serving-sized containers for a quick and healthy meal later on, taking out just what you need for that meal. Label and date containers so you know what they are and when to use them by, because it is easy to forget!

Frozen vegetables are often cheaper than fresh, have just as many nutrients, and have the added bonus of just being able to take out what you need with no waste. If you do use fresh, however, then save your vegetable scraps (such as carrot tops, onion trimmings, cabbage outer leaves and extra 'end' vegetable bits) in a large Ziploc bag or a plastic pre-used food container in the freezer. These can be used at a later date to make homemade vegetable stock, as the

base for a soup, a stew or a flavourful gravy without meat.

Meat-free meals are often significantly cheaper, particularly if you use cheap substitutes such as tinned beans or lentils to provide the protein element of the meal. If you're a meat fan, consider going meat-free for part of the week – you might be surprised by how much you enjoy it! A range of useful vegetarian recipes can be found on the [BBC Good Food](#) website.

Use the microwave: Microwaves are cheaper to run than conventional ovens, due to shorter cooking times and lower power consumption. They are also energy-efficient because they only heat the food itself rather than warming the air around the food, so they don't use as much energy to warm up. As such, instead of cooking every night, you might want to cook less often and freeze food, then warm the meals up in the microwave.

BBC Good Food has some handy hints on making the most of your microwave, and a list of meals that can be cooked using the microwave, [here](#).

Useful websites

- Money Saving Expert is a very useful website that offers lots of tips and suggestions on different ways to cut down on expenditure on food and household bills, and ways to save energy, check benefits and tax and lots more, including a Budget Planning Tool you can download. New information is added all the time and you can sign up for weekly email alerts.

www.moneysavingexpert.com

- Savvy Bites has a range of fresh, healthy recipes made with inexpensive and common ingredients available from Aldi UK, and includes downloadable budget meal planners.

savvybites.co.uk

- Savings 4 Savvy Mums features lots of meals for £1 a head and contains lots of helpful guides and tips such as The Ultimate Guide to Food Shopping on a Budget.

savings4savvymums.co.uk

- Some freecycling apps and websites, such as Too Good to Go, enable you to link to local restaurants and food outlets that have food left at the end of the day to sell for much less. You can get a “magic bag” with a mix of products, often of very high quality, for little or no cost.

toogoodtogo.co.uk