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Stretch Your Food Budget

It is possible to eat healthy and stick to a tight grocery budget. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach offers programs that will help you learn to plan meals, save money at the grocery store and cook meals that are tasty and healthy. They would love to welcome you to one of the groups!

The programs are for adults of any age who meet income eligibility requirements. If you participate in SNAP, WIC or free meals at school, you are automatically eligible. Groups meet in-person and through video chat. To learn more about programming in your area, complete this online form: https://iastate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d5L0oX-me3nzAnTT.

Bring the Zoo Home!

April showers may lead to May flowers, but they can make us feel stuck indoors sometimes! Work with your kids to create an indoor zoo!

Try activities such as frog hops, bear walk, starfish jumps, cheetah run, crab crawl, elephant stomps, flap like a bird, slither like a snake, stand like a flamingo, talk like a giraffe, etc. You can even see who can be the most creative. Can you neigh and prance like a unicorn?



MICROGREENS

- Have you heard of microgreens? They're young vegetable plants between the sprout and baby greens stage. Unlike sprouts, they have leaves, but the leaves are much smaller than baby greens.
- Grow them from a variety of seeds, including broccoli, radish, leafy greens or peas.
- Add them to salads, sandwiches or wraps for extra nutrition and flavor.



SPINACH

- Don't miss spring greens, like kale and spinach; they have so many nutrients including vitamins C and A.
- Look for them at farmers markets and grocery stores – or grow them. No space for a garden? Use a planter pot on a patio.
- Buy packaged fresh spinach at the store for convenience. Most are labeled “washed” so you don't need to wash it.



BABY KALE

- Want the health benefits of kale but don't like the strong taste? Try baby kale, which is much milder than regular (curly) kale.
- Mix it in with other salad greens or cook it for less time than you cook regular kale.
- Buy it or try growing this cool-weather plant. It grows well in Iowa.

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Child Care Assistance

You may be eligible to save money on child care and free up your budget for other important things like nutritious foods. Child Care Assistance is a program to help pay child care expenses. If your family meets the gross monthly income guidelines, and you're working at least 28 hours a week, going to school or attending a training program, you can get help with your child care expenses. To find out if you're eligible, apply online or print an application at <https://ccmis.dhs.state.ia.us/clientportal/>.

If accepted, you'd still get to choose who cares for your child. The child care provider must meet certain requirements, pass background checks and meet health and safety standards. The child care provider is paid directly from the program.

If you have questions about this opportunity, call the centralized child care unit at (866) 448-4605.

Take a Breath this December

This time of year can be stressful. Between school, work, family activities, holidays, extra curricular activities and performances, it's busy!

Try connecting and slowing down with some yoga. There are a lot of free videos online, or you can create your own moves mimicking animals such as a cat (on all fours and arch your back), butterfly (seated with your feet together and legs bent to look like a butterfly), and flamingo (standing, with one foot on the opposite knee, and hands over head).

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CARROT

- Put carrots - fresh, canned or frozen - on your grocery list for a low-cost veggie.
- Try petite carrots plain, with a dip, or microwave in the bag (if the package says "microwavable").
- Shred fresh carrots for a salad or smoothie. Cut them up for a stir-fry, or roast them with a little honey and oil.



BEEF

- Change up your menu with beets. Look for smaller beets which are more tender. Most beets you'll find are red.
- Remove the leaves, which you can eat raw or cooked, and store beets in the fridge for up to 3 weeks.
- Buy canned or pickled beets for an easy way to enjoy beets.



POTATO

- Eat potatoes for complex carbohydrates, potassium and vitamin C.
- Choose healthy toppings like cooked vegetables, chives, green onions, salsa or plain yogurt.
- Keep the skin on for fiber and flavor!

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Your Life Iowa

Healthy eating is important, but there are other areas of health that may need to be addressed first. If you or a loved one are facing problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling, mental health or suicidal thoughts, you can turn to **Your Life Iowa**.

Free and confidential help and information is available 24/7 by phone (855) 581-8111, by text (855) 895-8398 or online chat at yourlifeiowa.org, so you can talk, text or chat with someone right away. Follow Your Life Iowa on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, too. If you're not sure if you're at risk, check out the warning signs and "Am I at risk?" quizzes on the website.

Everyone needs help sometimes. No judgment. Just help.

Try Something New!

Hy-Vee Kids Fit has a large online library of kid-friendly at-home fitness videos – all for free! There are fitness-inspired videos along with sports-focused videos and videos that encourage the kids to try something new. Find them online at <https://www.hy-veekidsfit.com/>.

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Food Preservation

Food preservation is a way to keep fruits and vegetables safe to eat long after they're harvested. It maintains the taste, texture and nutrition of the food as much as possible. If you want to learn how to preserve your own garden produce, contact the ISU Extension office in your county to learn the

proper way so that no one gets food poisoning. You probably eat foods that are preserved all the time. Fruits and vegetables that are canned, frozen, pickled, dried or fermented are preserved. It's easier to eat more fruits and veggies when you eat them in all these different forms.



CANNED

- Trust in canned fruits and vegetables as a healthy option. The fruits and veggies are canned after fully ripe, when they contain the most nutrients.
- Keep canned fruits and veggies on hand for a quick side dish or snack.



FROZEN

- Feel good about buying frozen fruits and veggies. They are full of nutrients comparable to their fresh versions.
- Choose frozen fruits and veggies for a longer shelf-life than fresh, and the best option for some recipes.



FERMENTED

- Wow your taste buds with fermented cabbage known as kimchi, kraut or curtido.
- Know that fermentation uses microbes (tiny organisms, like bacteria) that are good for you.



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5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count!

Did you make a New Year's resolution? If you're like many others who participate in this tradition each January, you made a goal to improve your health. **5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count** can help! It's an initiative to help children (it's good for adults, too) develop good habits. Each number in the name stands for a health-related goal to strive for each day:

- **5** = Eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables.
- **2** = Keep recreational screen time to under 2 hours.
- **1** = Be active at least one hour a day.
- **0** = Limit sugary drinks. Choose water.

Change is not easy for most people. Try starting small and replacing an old behavior with a new behavior that is healthy – and enjoyable. For ideas and tips to meet your goals, go to www.iowahealthieststate.com/5210.

Take in the Sunshine

Getting outdoors and breathing in fresh air is important year round, not just in the spring and summer. Does going out in the cold and snow feel a bit daunting? Putting on the hats, mittens, and boots can feel like a lot of work, but it makes the cold temperatures more tolerable.

Try heading out on a sunny day; the sunshine is often an instant mood booster. If you're really struggling, set a timer for 20 minutes and agree to stay out that long. Often everyone is having so much fun when the buzzer goes off, you won't even want to go back in just yet!



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Winter Squash



- Warm up with winter squash! It grows in Iowa and is in the gourd family. It's different from summer squash in that it has a hard outer skin, called the rind, that is not eaten.
- Be a brave taster (like we say with the kids in class) and try different kinds of squash.
- Learn how to cut and cook squash from ISU Extension Spend Smart. Eat Smart. (<https://bit.ly/3vz2Kbb>).
- Don't worry about not using it right away; whole, uncut squash will keep in a cool, dark place for a month or longer.
- Enjoy the convenience of canned pumpkin. It's good for baking or can be mixed with vanilla yogurt and topped with granola for a snack.

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Create a Ninja Course!

Cabin fever can be a lot for everyone, parents and kids included! Give your kids an opportunity to get creative and let loose indoors (with some boundaries, naturally). Set up your own Ninja course with these ideas the next time the weather keeps the kids inside.

- Create an obstacle or ninja course by using couch cushions.
- Create a balance beam with tape on the floor.
- Jump from square to square on floor tiles.
- Hit a balloon like a volleyball, fly like a superhero, etc.

Have kids take turns timing their runs through the course to see who can beat their previous time!



BEANS

- Add canned or dried beans to your meals for a good source of fiber and protein. On average, one-half cup of cooked beans has about 7 grams of protein and 7-8 grams of fiber.
- Follow the instructions on the package to prepare dried beans. Canned beans are ready to eat. Rinse and drain them for less sodium and liquid.
- For a quick black bean salsa, mix 1 can black beans (15 ounces, drained and rinsed), 1 ½ cups corn and 1 jar (16 ounces) salsa.

(Recipe provided by Iowa State University's Spend Smart. Eat Smart.®)

SNAP

Sometimes families go through hard times. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can help families purchase groceries. To find out if you're eligible, visit www.dhs.iowa.gov/how-to-apply. To apply by phone, call the Iowa Food Assistance Hotline at (855) 944-3663 from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday - Friday.

The SNAP/EBT card can be used to pay for food ordered online at Amazon and participating ALDI, Walmart, Hy-Vee and New Pioneer Food Co-op locations. Some stores allow for payment online and some require you to swipe your EBT card at the store when you pick up your online order. You will be provided with specific payment instructions when the order is placed. Also note that SNAP benefits cannot be used to pay for service or delivery costs.

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CORN

- Want your kids to eat their veggies? Eat veggies with your child at the next meal. They learn by watching you.
- Why not serve corn? It's easy to find canned or frozen in the winter (or anytime, really) and fresh in the summer. Tip: Learn how to freeze some of that delicious Iowa sweet corn this summer and enjoy it all year.
- Eat corn plain as a side dish or add it to your soup, salsa, taco salad, quesadilla or pancake batter. Finish off Mexican rice with corn on top.

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Keep Active this Summer!

Beautiful weather outdoors definitely makes it easier to get in physical activity. Take advantage of all your community has to offer. Make a summer bucket list full of local parks, aquatic centers and splash pads, summer reading activities at the library, hikes on local trails and creative games in the yard.

Kids will look forward to the activities and checking them off the list. Remember that kids need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, all year long!



Summer Meals

Soon students will celebrate the end of the school year. It's an exciting time as kids move on to the next grade and take a break from the normal routine. Healthy lunches don't have to end with the school year, however. Most communities offer free lunches to all children age 18 and under during the summer. These meals meet nutrition guidelines and help ensure kids don't go hungry.

Look for information from your school about where and when meals will be served. You can also text "Food" or "Comida" (for Spanish) to 877-877. Or, go to www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks and enter your address to find the nearest location.

Many meal sites offer fun activities for the kids to do before or after the meal, such as a game, art project, gardening or special program.

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RADISH

- Enjoy this root veggie while in season. It grows well (and fast!) in Iowa in the spring or fall when it's not too hot. It's ready to harvest 3-5 weeks after planting.
- Like spicy foods? Radishes vary in spiciness depending on the variety. The red ones you find in the grocery store are moderately spicy as far as radishes go. Cook them and they become milder.
- Try another kind of radish popular in Asian dishes. The daikon radish is a longer, white radish that is sweet and mild compared to the small, round red radish.



TURNIP

- Did you know that turnips are also a root vegetable? Like radishes, turnips grow underground and are the root of the plant. (You may eat other root veggies, like carrots and potatoes.)
- Choose smaller turnips, which are more tender and taste better.
- Eat them raw in slaws, salads or with a dip. Or, cook them in a variety of ways, such as microwave, bake, roast or sauté.

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WIC

If you or someone in your family has lost income, you may be eligible for WIC. The WIC Program is for families with infants and children up to age 5 as well as pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding women who recently had a baby. The program provides healthy foods and offers breastfeeding support for new moms.

Each month, families can purchase a variety of foods at the grocery store with their WIC benefits, including fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. During the summer, additional dollars are offered to purchase fruits and vegetables at farmers markets.

WIC also provides nutrition education, access to recipes and cooking videos, and referrals to other programs. To find a location close to you, go to signupwic.com or call the state office at (800)-532-1579. For more information visit: <https://idph.iowa.gov/wic>.

Make a Game Out of It!

Physical activity doesn't have to be organized sports or traditional exercise. It can be playing a fun silly game with your child. Try playing a game with UNO® cards, a traditional deck of cards or dice. Have your kids determine an activity for each color, suit or number. Then do that activity as many times as the number on the card.

Here are some examples to get started:

- Squats
- Starfish jumps or jumping jacks
- Dance or "air" instruments
- Arm circles
- Skipping
- Free choices for the wild cards or jokers

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CABBAGE

- Try green, red, Napa, Bok-choy, or savoy cabbage - all part of the Brassica family (the same family that includes nutrition superstars broccoli and kale).
- Add to stir-fries or Asian noodle dishes. Top fish tacos with coleslaw or pupusas with curtido.
- Grow it in the spring or fall when it's cooler.



BRUSSELS SPROUTS

- Grow or find a Brussels sprout plant and you'll be amazed. The sprouts, which look like baby cabbages, grow along the tall stem.
- Store Brussels sprouts (another Brassica veggie) in the fridge. Rinse, peel off wilted layers, cut off the stem and slice in half before cooking.
- Try them roasted, steamed or sauteed.



KOHLRABI

- Expand your veggie options and try kohlrabi, another member of the Brassica family.
- Don't confuse it for a root vegetable; it grows above ground.
- Enjoy the light green or purple "bulbs" raw, steamed or roasted. You can eat the leaves, too!

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A Great Way to Start the Day!

Walking to school is a great way to connect with your child as the day begins. Oftentimes we default to driving to and from the school, and the drop off and pick up lane can end up being really stressful!

To avoid the carpool lane headache, try parking near the school and walking with your student. It will give you 5-10 minutes each day to connect, which can help maintain a close relationship and open communication with your child. An added bonus, a few minutes of physical activity and some sunshine makes everyone feel good!



Farm to School – and Home!

This year in the Pick a better snack™ program, your child will have the opportunity to taste different fruits and vegetables that can grow in Iowa. Some of the produce students taste in class will actually come from farms in your community! We're excited to support local farmers and growers and to continue to teach students about where food comes from.

You may even be inspired to grow some of your own fruits and veggies. For those that participate in SNAP/ EBT, did you know that you can use your benefits to purchase food-producing seeds and plants?

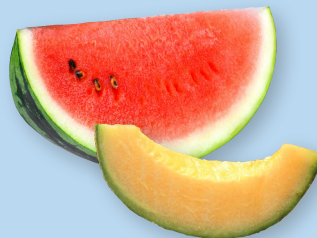
Another way to get involved in growing fruits and vegetables is to volunteer in your school or community garden. It's a great way to help out, and you'll most likely take home yummy food.

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APPLE

- Visit an Iowa orchard and find many favorite varieties: Honeycrisp, Red Delicious, Gala, McIntosh, Regents and Zestar.
- Wash, then bite – a satisfying snack with over 4 grams of fiber (with skin).
- Store in the fridge for up to 3 weeks. Since they keep so long, you're less likely to throw them out and waste food.



MELON

- Grab a melon before they are out of season, which runs July through October.
- Mix into a fruit salad or cut into wedges or bite-size pieces for a sweet, healthy snack or dessert.
- Look for cantaloupe with yellowish skin. A good watermelon will have a flat, yellow spot where it touched the ground while ripening.



PEAR

- Eat them in the fall while in season; they taste better, and you'll get a better deal.
- Place fresh pears in a paper sack on the countertop to ripen if needed. Rinse under water when ready to eat.
- Leave the skin on for more fiber and other nutrients.

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Move Your Way

Getting kids 60 minutes of physical activity everyday can seem like a lot. The good news is that it can be broken down into smaller pieces throughout the day, and it all adds up!

A typical day could include a walk to school (10 minutes), recess (20 minutes), a walk home from school (10 minutes), playing in the park (15 minutes) and a family dance party after dinner (5 minutes). This adds up to 60 minutes!

The Move Your Way campaign has a lot of ways you can find movement throughout the day. Check out <https://health.gov/moveyourway#parents>.



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Spend Smart. Eat Smart.

This app can help you save money. Download the Spend Smart. Eat Smart. app and use the unit price calculator at the grocery store to compare similar items. If you want to know if it's cheaper to buy canned or frozen peas, enter the cost and amount for each product. It will show you the better deal!

Another great thing about this app is that it can help you pick good quality produce. Go to the Produce Basics section (listed under More) and find the list of fruits and vegetables. Click one to learn how to buy, store and prepare it. A handy tool when buying fruits and veggies!



TOMATO

- Don't miss the best-tasting tomatoes, which are grown locally and ready to eat in July – September.
- Store whole tomatoes on the countertop, not in the fridge.
- Try cherry or grape tomatoes for an easy snack.



CUCUMBER

- Want something cool and refreshing? Try cucumbers.
- Eat plain or with a dip, or add to salads, sandwiches and fresh spring rolls for an extra crunch!
- Store uncut cucumbers in the fridge for up to 7-10 days. Clean under cool running water before eating.



EGGPLANT

- Check your local farmers market for this versatile garden vegetable.
- Look for different kinds; Chinese and Japanese eggplants are long, skinny and cook up quickly.
- Eat grilled, roasted, baked – or any way you like it!