Eat Well, Pay Little

As prices soar, you can still afford the nutrition you need without breaking the bank.

November 1, 2008 By Laura Whitehorn

Along with meds, good nutrition helps keep HIV from gobbling up your health. You can feed your body—with attention to your particular needs—even when you're starved for funds. Here are cost-cutting tips tailored to four dietary needs:

1. You have high blood-fat levels and cardiovascular risk

3 nutrients you need: omega-3 oil, olive oil and dietary fiber.

3 inexpensive ways to get them:

- Olive oil is cheaper if bought in bulk, and it stays fresh if you treat it right. Buy the largest size, pouring some into a jar for daily use. Refrigerate the rest (shake well before decanting the next batch), or store it in a dark, cool place. You may save as much as 12 cents per ounce.
- Inexpensive canned mackerel and sardines both boast high levels of omega-3 oils (and low levels of mercury). Mash sardines or mackerel and mix in some mustard, scallions and a dab of low-fat mayo for a sandwich spread (try it on whole-grain bread). Or sauté mackerel with garlic, ginger, lime juice, chili powder and cilantro.
- Add fiber—but not cost—to dinner by mixing shredded chicken or sliced fish with some cooked lentils or chickpeas, diced, low-cost cooking apples and shredded cabbage (plus your favorite seasonings). Baked sweet potatoes or yams are cheap, delicious and high in fiber—eat the skin too.

2. You have chronic diarrhea

3 nutrients you need: soluble (gentle) fiber, extra fluids, and foods high in starch.

3 inexpensive ways to get them:

- Buy large-size jars of your supermarket brand applesauce (rich in soluble fiber; just make sure it’s not loaded with extra sugar). Sprinkle with grated nutmeg—it slows movement in the intestines, easing diarrhea.
- Dilute apple, pear or another non-citrus fruit juice with water. It will go further and still prevent dehydration. Avoid caffeine and milk drinks to stem diarrhea (and save money).
- White rice is a good bulking agent—that’s why it figures in the BRATT diet: bananas, rice, applesauce, toast and (herbal) tea. Buy large bags of rice to save some dough.

3. You have high blood-sugar levels (diabetes or pre-diabetes)

3 nutrients you need: the ingredients of a Mediterranean diet (shown to help lower diabetes risk)—olive oil, low-fat protein and antioxidant-laden green leafy veggies

3 inexpensive ways to get them:

- Cut down portions and costs of meat and fish by cooking one-pot dishes. Add cooked, whole-wheat pasta or lentils to sautéed onions, garlic and spinach, plus shredded, skinless chicken or diced fish—sautéed in a little olive oil, of course.
- Choose frozen spinach, kale and collards over fresh. You’ll save as much as 10 cents an ounce; you’ll waste less (unlike fresh greens, they won’t go bad); and they rival fresh produce in nutrients.
- Buy local fish and produce, and stretch a portion of olives by chopping them into a salad in place of whole olives.

4. You have some unwanted extra pounds

3 nutrients you need: lean protein, complex carbs (found in whole-grain bread and pasta) and high-fiber veggies.

3 inexpensive ways to get them:

- If you often eat alone, buy a broiled supermarket chicken (about $5). Combine a small portion (meat shredded, skin removed) with sautéed or steamed veggies for a week’s worth of effortless meals —less caloric (and expensive) than a burger.
- Try fresh beets. They pack fewer than 60 calories in an entire cup but have high nutritional value; you can use the entire vegetable, including the greens. Steam, drain and cool, then chop them and sprinkle with a little oil and vinegar, salt, pepper and herbs, plus a tablespoon of crumbled goat or feta cheese for a satisfying salad. Don’t like beets? Cabbage is another inexpensive, nutritious and filling veg. Steam or sauté it with herbs and spices. (Adding spice to any dish makes it seem more filling.)
- Celery and carrots provide a filling low-cal snack (the fiber slows food leaving the stomach so you feel full longer). Choose whole over baby carrots—ounce for ounce, the babies can cost twice as much. Wash, trim, cut and store a bunch each of carrots and celery for a week of snacks.

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