

\$10 Family Meals

Recently I have been costing family meals for under \$10 and confirmed what has often been said, that fresh fruit and vegetables are expensive for people with little disposable income. It really is not easy making a meal using fresh vegetables for two adults and two or three children for under \$10. A bunch of silverbeet would blow half the meal budget and you can forget about salads, fresh herbs and other fancy garnishes like feta cheese, a sprinkle of toasted pine nuts or even crushed peanuts on a curry. It seems eating cheaply has always been a carb-heavy affair. In Australia, even buying protein, like chicken pieces and eggs, is relatively cheap compared with fresh fruit and vegetables. It seems that for \$10 you either have meat or vegetables, not both. There are a couple of ways of adding vegetables on a tight budget; being strategic, such as buying on closing time at fresh produce markets and aiming for frozen vegetables, particularly peas and spinach which are good products and quite cheap. The other solution is to grow your own vegetables but a vegetable garden not only requires an initial outlay but knowledge and time to maintain in a cost effective way. However, at the very least a bed of easy to grow parsley can add much needed nutrients to a carb-laden meal. I am pretty sure that, apart from esthetic considerations, my mother put chopped parsley on just about everything to keep us healthy.

While we are told to increase our vegetable intake over meat and carbohydrate for a healthy diet it remains something easier said than done for a lot of people. I've costed three examples of economical meals based on supermarket prices. While I have resorted to using frozen vegetables in some meals, a fresh head of cauliflower is quite economical at around \$4 and can feed a family when made into fritters, a curry korma or a pasta bake. Spaghetti and meatballs, made my preferred way, with Italian pork sausage rather than

mincemeat, happily turned out to be the cheaper option. I'm just very lucky I can afford a green salad to have with it. Even if your food budget allows for a lot more latitude it is a sobering exercise to cost every ingredient of some of your meals.

Spaghetti with Meatballs

To keep the cost below \$10 I have suggested bought bread crumbs which are very cheap but you can use crumbs made from stale bread you have at hand. Coating the meatballs with flour not only gives it a nice crust but thickens the sauce. The meatballs can also be coated with breadcrumbs. I have suggested a tin of crushed tomatoes and tomato paste as an economical option to get two ingredients at one hit but a plain can of tomatoes is fine.

- 2 Italian style pork sausages or chipolatas (approx. 230g) \$4.50
- 1 can Ardmona Rich & Thick diced tomatoes with tomato paste \$1.80
- 60 g bread crumbs \$0.14 (\$1.69/750g bag)
- 50 ml milk \$0.06 (\$1.29/L)
- 100 g plain flour \$0.10 (\$1/kg)
- pinch fennel seeds, optional \$0.14 (\$1.46/100 g)
- 100 ml olive oil \$0.58 (Spanish \$5.80/L)
- Less than 500 g durum wheat pasta \$1 (supermarket brand) (about 85 g per adult)
- 100 g grated Parmesan cheese \$1.60 (packet grated cheese)

Total \$9.92

Soak the bread crumbs in milk until soft. Drain off any excess milk. Remove the sausages from the casing and add to the breadcrumbs with the crushed fennel seeds. Knead together well and form into small balls (as a rule of thumb, about the size of the first joint of your thumb). Roll the balls in flour and

shallow fry in olive oil, rotating each ball with two forks until golden brown. Take the frying pan off the heat for a minute to prevent any splatter when you add the can of crushed tomatoes to the pan. Cook the meatballs and sauce gently for about 15-20 minutes. The flour on the meatballs should thicken the sauce nicely. Boil water in a large pot, salt it well and cook the pasta *al dente*. Drain the pasta and add it directly to the frypan with the meatballs, stirring to coat the pasta with the sauce. Plate up and sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese.

Rice Bowl with Edamame and Mushrooms

Buying crushed ginger in a jar is much cheaper than buying fresh ginger. Edamame or soy beans are a nutritious and high protein vegetable and available frozen in their pods.

- 2 onions 250 g \$0.62 (\$2.50/kg)
- 20 g crushed ginger \$0.24 (\$2.80/230g jar)
- 50 ml vegetable oil \$0.40 (\$3/750 ml)
- 500 g button mushrooms \$4.00
- 100 ml soy sauce \$0.57 (\$2.85/500 ml)
- 450 g frozen edamame \$2.90
- 400 g rice \$0.56 or \$1.60 (supermarket brand long grain \$1.40/kg or Hinata short grain rice \$4/kg)

Total \$8.89 or \$9.93

Cook the rice in a rice cooker or on the stove by the absorption method. Meanwhile cook the vegetables. Boil the edamame for about 5 minutes in a pot of water. Drain and peel the soy beans, discarding the shells. Slice the onions and saute in a frypan with the crushed ginger until golden. Slice and add the mushrooms to pan and cook until soft. Add the soy sauce, stir and reduce the liquid. Add the cooked edamame and stir briefly. Put cooked rice in the rice bowls and top with

the vegetables. Extras-top with toasted sesame seeds.

Orzotto with Spinach and Peas

Orzotto is like a risotto but made with pearl barley instead of arborio rice. It is very nutritious, sustaining and has a lower glycemic index than white rice.

- 2 onions 250 g \$0.62 (\$2.50/kg)
- 100 ml olive oil \$0.58 (50 ml for finishing)
- 400 g pearl barley \$1.04 (\$2.60/ kg)
- Approx 200 g pork sausages \$4.70 (\$23.63/ kg)
- 1 clove garlic \$0.12 (\$1.25/head)
- 250 g packet frozen spinach \$0.95
- 300 g frozen peas \$0.60 (\$2/kg)

Total \$8.61

Chop the onions and saute in large saucepan with a little olive oil until translucent. Remove the sausage from its casing and crumble into the saucepan and stir until it has lost its raw colour. Finely chop the garlic and add to the pot along with the pearl barley. Stir to coat with the oil and then add water or vegetable stock to cover. Cook until tender, approximately 25-30 minutes, adding more water if needed. Add the peas and spinach and cook for a further five minutes. Add a few slugs of olive oil and stir well to create a creamy emulsion and serve.