

Frugal Meal Planning Cheat Sheet

Plan smarter, waste less, and eat well on a budget. Use this printable to build a weekly plan in minutes.

1. 5-Step Weekly Flow

- Set a weekly food budget (e.g., \$60–\$80 per adult).
- Pantry-first menu: list 5–7 meals using what you already have.
- Shop by unit price and the sales flyer; substitute items freely.
- Batch-cook 1–2 mains; portion extras to the freezer.
- Track cost per serving and repeat winners next week.

2. Pantry-First Menu Builder (base + veg + protein)

Plug in a base, add vegetables, pick a protein, then flavor.

Theme	Base (grain/veg)	Protein (pick one)	Add-ons / Flavor
Bowl	Rice, quinoa, mixed greens	Chicken, eggs, tofu, beans	Salsa, avocado, soy sauce, herbs
Tacos/Wraps	Tortillas, lettuce cups	Beans, ground turkey/beef	Slaw, cheese, pico, hot sauce
Stir-Fry	Rice, noodles, cabbage mix	Eggs, tofu, chicken strips	Garlic, ginger, soy, chili flakes
Pasta Night	Pasta or zoodles	Tuna, chicken, white beans	Marinara/pesto, parmesan, olives
Soup/Stew	Broth or tomato base + veg	Lentils, beans, shredded chx	Bay leaf, cumin, frozen veggies

3. \$2–\$3 Per-Serving Recipe Starters

Breakfast:

- Oats + peanut butter + banana • Greek yogurt + granola + berries • Egg + veggie scramble + toast

Lunch:

- Bean + rice bowl + salsa • Tuna pasta salad • Hummus wrap + carrots

Dinner:

- Lentil chili • Sheet-pan chicken + potatoes + carrots • Stir-fry veg + eggs over rice

4. Freezer & Batch-Cook Map

Item	Make Once	Freeze	Thaw/Use
Rice/Quinoa	6–8 cups cooked	Flat bags, 2 cups ea	Microwave with splash of water
Shredded Chicken	Slow-cook 2–3 lb	Portion 8–10 oz	Tacos, soups, bowls
Meat Sauce	2–3 lb ground meat + sauce	1–2 cup portions	Pasta, stuffed peppers, skillet
Veg Chili	Big pot (8–10 servings)	1–2 cup portions	Bowls, baked potato topper
Pancakes/Waffles	Double batch	Single layer stacks	Toaster or pan reheat
Soup Bases	Mirepoix + broth + spices	Quart containers	Add pasta/beans/greens and simmer

5. Shopping List & Cost Tracker

Categories (fill amounts):

Produce \$ _____ Protein \$ _____ Grains/Dairy \$ _____ Frozen/Staples \$ _____

Snacks/Other \$ _____ Total \$ _____

Shopping List:

Item | Qty | Unit Price | Notes

6. Quick Tips to Keep Costs Down

- Plan around “loss leader” sales (front page of flyer).
- Compare unit prices—bigger isn’t always cheaper.
- Substitute by category (any bean for bean, any green for green).
- Use leftovers as “remix” meals (tacos, fried rice, wraps).
- Keep 5 “winner” meals on rotation.
- Stock an emergency shelf: pasta, rice, beans, tuna, frozen veg.

- Keep 1–2 freezer meals ready for busy nights.

Tip: Start small—optimize one meal per day this week, then build. Consistency beats perfection.