

How to Keep the Grocery Bills Low on the Raw Diet

by Pamela Fay

You feel terrific on a raw food diet. But, without careful planning, you may feel the strain on your wallet. As counter-intuitive as it may seem, a raw food diet can take your grocery bill through the roof. According to a 2007 study at the University of Washington, high-calorie, energy-dense foods, i.e. junk foods, are a bargain if you are on a budget. You can, however, successfully maintain a raw diet on a low budget with a few carefully conceived strategies.

Identify your favorite recipes. Find your favorite raw recipes in raw food preparation books or at an online forum. Start with a few dozen recipes. Whittle the list down to 15 to 20 recipes that use raw foods you enjoy. Include a good, everyday green salad. Eliminate recipes that use hard-to-find ingredients or, alternatively make readily available substitutions. Raw recipes are very forgiving.

Prepare a staples list. Raw food ingredients range from cheap to very costly. Some inexpensive ingredients include bananas, sunflower seeds, carrots, onions, home grown sprouts and flaxseed. For example, if your recipe calls for macadamia nuts, substitute some or all of the nuts with sunflower seeds. If you have never had the recipe, you won't know the difference. Prepare a list of staples—items you should have on hand at all times. Many of these items are shelf stable, like agave, nuts and seeds, sun-dried tomatoes and liquid aminos. Other items, although they are not shelf stable, will be used within a couple of days. These include, for example, your salad fixings. Seasonal items like figs will not make your list of staples and, indeed, to keep your grocery bill low, should only be purchased in season and on sale.

Research low-cost sources. Visit the stores in your area with your staples list in hand. In addition to supermarkets, go to club or warehouse stores and farmer's markets, as well as ethnic markets. There may be a cash and carry store in your city that serves the wholesale restaurant buyer. Be sure to browse the bulk foods aisles. Look for the lowest prices and reasonable quantity packs of the items on your list. Weigh the cost of warehouse membership against the benefit. You may be able to find the items you use in larger quantities at a comparable price elsewhere. Do not trust this exercise to memory; take detailed notes. Talk to the produce managers. They may help by offering to sell you overripe bananas or letting you know when to find the best selection.

Plan your menus each week. Determine how you will eat. When you are hungry without a plan, you may dip your spoon into the organic almond butter rather than reach for the banana. If you are new to raw, you may be constantly hungry and eat more than you ever thought possible. How could you know that you would eat all of your ripe avocados in three days? Now you're craving fresh guacamole and your only choice is to buy a tiny amount freshly prepared at the gourmet market – for \$8. What are your favorite whole foods? Do you prefer sweet fruits for breakfast and heavier foods for lunch and dinner? Which foods are most satiating for you? You may be surprised at the quantity of food needed at first. But, if you know you will eat a ton of avocados, you can keep your

grocery bills low by purchasing a case at a warehouse store rather than buying them individually at a higher cost.

Shop wisely and often. On a raw diet, you will need to shop every three days or so. This will minimize spoilage. The shopping trips are fast, however, and usually only cover the periphery of the store. Head straight to produce and avoid the inner aisles. In particular, avoid your gourmet market's raw food section. Those tempting treats are way too expensive. Make your own flax crackers for dimes, not dollars. You may want to support organic farming methods and may be able to...eventually. However, your bills will be lower purchasing conventional. If you can afford it, though, buy organic thin-skinned produce, such as lettuce, bell peppers, berries and apples.

Store foods well. Use green bags and storage systems intended to preserve freshness. Check your produce daily. Slice overripe bananas to freeze for smoothies. Place ripe avocados in the refrigerator. This slows the ripening process so that they can be used over the next week. If an avocado is about to go south, peel it, mash it and freeze it in an airtight container. Use it within a month for guacamole or in a raw dressing. Identify the ripest tomato and put it on the counter to use today. Regularly go through your refrigerator's produce drawer for items that are about to expire. Use or juice whatever you can.

Reduce waste. Raw diets encourage minimalism and low impact on the planet. You may be able to reduce some of the ingredients in your favorite recipes without sacrificing taste. For example, reduce your grocery bill for almond milk by using just a third cup of almonds per quart, not the whole cup recommended. When a recipe calls for agave, try leaving it out or cutting the amount by half. Avocados are filling but high in calories. If you don't need the energy, drastically reduce the amount of avocado that you use in your salads.

Dehydrate left over raw soups and sauces with ground flaxseed to make crackers. Use almond meal, leftover from making milk, for cookies. Add a spoonful of raw almond butter and a squirt or two of agave. Throw in raisins and cinnamon, form into balls, and dehydrate. If you juice, do not throw out the pulp. To carrot pulp, add a raw mayonnaise, kelp or dulse, chopped onions, celery and raw pickles to make "tuna." If you don't juice, your local juice bar make save pulp for you.

Other tips:

Your top priority is to establish the raw food habit in a way that you can sustain.

Don't worry about dogma. And, do not give up on raw because you cannot follow the diet to someone else's satisfaction.

Do what makes you feel good and fits your food budget.

Try to get as wide a variety of food as you can.

References

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