Q: How can I follow a nutritious vegan diet without busting my food budget?

One of the biggest misconceptions about a vegan diet is that it is too expensive to maintain, and that is simply (soy) baloney! Here are some tips for eating a healthy vegan diet while staying on a budget.

Cook For Yourself

It seems that my generation and those younger are so spoiled by convenience foods that we all at the idea of having to boil a pot of water. Relying on pre-packaged items, such as expensive frozen meals, or dining at pricey restaurants can send your weekly food budget through the roof. If you are scared of venturing into the kitchen, help is on the way. There are so many wonderful cookbooks, websites and podcasts that teach everything from properly cutting an onion to assembling a three-layer cake. For free recipes and cooking videos, check out ChooseVeg.com.

Stick With the Basics

Beans, grains and produce are low-cost and should be the backbone of any healthy vegan diet. A two-pound bag of dried beans costs around $1 at my local grocer and will easily feed me and my husband for a few meals when used in dishes like chili and soup. Even canned beans are affordable and require zero preparation. Full of protein and fiber, beans are very easy to prepare and have a variety of uses. A bowl of rice and beans with a little bit of salsa and a salad is one of the cheapest and most filling meals I have found. Fresh and frozen produce of rice and beans with a little bit of salsa and a salad is one of the cheapest and most filling meals I have found. Fresh and frozen produce of rice and beans with a little bit of salsa and a salad is one of the cheapest and most filling meals I have found.

Make A List

List making is in my genes. My dad is a chronic list-maker. Wish lists, “to-do” lists, “books to read before I die” lists – I enjoy making them all. The grocery list is no exception. Taking the time to create a shopping list for a week’s worth of meals can be daunting at first, but you will get the hang of it. Just remember, you are saving money!

Think Ethnic

When someone asks me, “Well, what do you eat?” as if I am dramatically limiting my options by choosing to go cruelty-free, I take pleasure in naming foods of which they have never heard. The plethora of international cuisine, whether it is Indian, Asian, Mexican or Middle Eastern, is not only tasty but really inexpensive. Chana Masala, an Indian dish, is one of my all-time favorites that costs well under $5 to make and feeds me for a few meals.

If you are watching your budget, chances are your friends are too. Planning a potluck in which everyone brings a vegan dish is a great way to enjoy a yummy meal, while only investing the time and money for the one dish you prepared.

Just remember, you work hard for your paycheck, so it’s ok to spend $5 on dessert at your favorite vegan bakery every now and again. Plus, you are helping a vegan establishment stay in business. So, indulge!

Featured Product

Thanks to Crispy Cat candy bars, you’ll always be able to satisfy your candy cravings! Asheville-based Tree Huggin’ Treats has a line of candy bars to treat the taste buds of cruelty-free candy lovers everywhere.

Featured Product

Righteous Orbs

The best tip for this recipe is to use staked bread. Alternatively, leave some bread out overnight or lightly toast it before cooking.

Freedom French-Toast

With a blender or food processor, blend the tofu, syrup, cinnamon, vanilla, salt, apple juice, and oil until smooth. In a large shallow bowl, pour batter; a lightly oiled hot frying pan and cover. let sit on medium heat until underside is golden brown. Flip toast over and cook other side until golden brown. Repeat process until bread is gone. Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

Recipes from Vegan A Go-Go!

A lovely alternative to tomato sauce, this tasty pasta will have you wishing you doubled the recipe so you could have leftovers. If you can’t find vegan sausage, try throwing in half a small can of beans (your choice) or nothing at all.

Pasta, enough for two people
1 medium onion, chopped
1 cup vegan sausage, sliced
1 tbsp oil
1 1/2 oz can unsweetened pumpkin puree
1/2 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper
1/4 – 1/2 cup vegetable stock (optional)
1/2 cup vegan cheese, grated (optional)

Boil the pasta in a large pot of salted water. While pasta is cooking, in a large saucepan on medium-high heat, sauté the onions and “sausage” in the oil until onions are translucent. Add the pumpkin, salt, and pepper and simmer for 5 – 7 minutes. This sauce can be quite thick, so to thin it out, add 1/4 cup stock at a time until you’ve reached the desired consistency. When pasta is cooked, drain noodles and return to pot. Add the sauce to noodles and toss well. Serve immediately, garnished with “cheese.” Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

Righteous Orbs

These orbs will help keep your energy up for those late night quests. If you can’t find hemp seeds, then you can use finely shredded coconut or sesame seeds.

1/2 cup shelled hemp seeds
2 cups nuts of your choice (walnuts, almonds, pecans, etc.)
1 cup raisins
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp salt
1 tbsp oil (e.g., flax or hemp)
2 tbsp agave nectar or maple syrup

Place a sheet of parchment or wax paper on a large plate or cookie sheet. Set aside. Measure out seeds onto a small plate and set aside. In a food processor; blend the remaining ingredients until mixture starts to pull away from the sides of the mixer and forms a dough. Transfer dough to a large bowl and scoop out spoonfuls to form 16 golf ball-sized balls. Roll each ball in hemp seeds until coated. Place on lined plate or cookie sheet and refrigerate for 1 hour before serving. Makes 16 orbs.

Freedom French-Toast

The best tip for this recipe is to use staked bread. Alternatively, leave some bread out overnight or lightly toast it before cooking.

1/4 cup soft or silken tofu
2 tbsp maple syrup
1/4 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 cup apple juice or water
1 tbsp oil
4 – 6 large slices bread, stale

With a blender or food processor, blend the tofu, syrup, cinnamon, vanilla, salt, apple juice, and oil until smooth. In a large shallow bowl, pour batter; dip bread slices into batter and coat both sides. Fry in a hot non-stick pan or a lightly oiled hot frying pan and cover. Let sit on medium heat until underside is golden brown. Flip toast over and cook other side until golden brown. Repeat process until bread is gone. Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

Punk-kin Pasta

Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

1 14-oz can unsweetened pumpkin purée
1 tbsp oil
1 1/2 oz can unsweetened pumpkin purée
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp black pepper
1/4 – 1/2 cup vegetable stock (optional)
1/2 cup vegan cheese, grated (optional)

Boil the pasta in a large pot of salted water. While pasta is cooking, in a large saucepan on medium-high heat, sauté the onions and “sausage” in the oil until onions are translucent. Add the pumpkin, salt, and pepper and simmer for 5 – 7 minutes. This sauce can be quite thick, so to thin it out, add 1/4 cup stock at a time until you’ve reached the desired consistency. When pasta is cooked, drain noodles and return to pot. Add the sauce to noodles and toss well. Serve immediately, garnished with “cheese.” Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

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