

# Budgeting *for* wellness

*Recession-era care that doesn't break the bank*

By Nina Polien Light

**I**f the poor economy is personally and financially stressing you, self-care may be low on the to-do list. But even during a recession, it's important to nurture well-being. Maintaining health needn't be costly. Here are tips for stretching any wellness budget.

## **Eat Well**

Food is the fuel your body needs to function properly, so don't skip or skimp on meals to save money. You can eat well without restricting yourself to boxed macaroni and cheese.

"My No. 1 tip for eating healthy when things are tight is, 'Make every bite count. Get your nutrient-rich foods in first before the junk,'" advises Susan Yarus Meisel, a dietitian and certified diabetes educator in private practice. Protein, fruit, vegetables, dairy products and wholegrain starches should top the grocery list.

Purchase large packages of healthy foods instead of more costly single portions. Examples include 16-ounce tubs of low-fat yogurt and "family packs" of chicken. Slicing bulk chicken breasts – then seasoning, baking and freezing them – is healthier and more economical than buying processed chicken strips. When frozen in small quantities, they can be thawed as needed for use in salads, sandwiches or other recipes.

Instead of relying on expensive cuts of lean meats, incorporate less costly protein sources into your diet, such as beans, eggs and peanut butter. Use the latter sparingly because of its fat content. Nuts can be purchased in bulk and sprinkled on yogurt, unsweetened cereal or salads for a crunchy protein boost. But stay away from sugar-coated nuts, Meisel cautions.

You can indulge your sweet tooth with healthy snacks. Meisel suggests baking granola or oatmeal cookies instead of purchasing oversized bakery treats. Simply



*Tossing chicken breast strips with whole-grain pasta and vegetables is a delicious and nutritious way to contain food costs.*

replace the chips in your favorite chocolate-chip recipe with low-fat or low-sugar granola or oatmeal. Topping no-sugar-added applesauce with ground cinnamon is also refreshing and budget-friendly.

### Drink to your Health

Stay hydrated by drinking all day, but don't feel compelled to shell out big bucks for "health drinks" or bottled water.

Many sports and vitamin beverages contain 50-100 calories per serving, but beware: Some bottles hold 2-1/2 to 5 servings; chug it all, and you may have consumed up to 500 calories! Athletes needing quick energy can add powdered generic versions of sports drinks to tap water for a cheaper alternative to pre-mixed bottles.

Still, tap water remains the healthiest, cheapest choice. If you're concerned about your water's purity, invest in a filtration system – some filters fit over faucets, while others are in pitchers. It's cheaper – and greener – than buying water in plastic bottles. Don't like H2O? "Put slices of oranges in your water to give it a tasteful boost," Meisel suggests.



### Protect Your Smile

Taking care of your teeth safeguards your health and boosts self-esteem, says The Healthy Smile's Dr. Jeffrey Gross, DDS, FAGD.

"Research demonstrates that oral health is connected to cardiac health, disease control, and a variety of other inflammatory processes in the body," he says. The cost of regular check-ups is less expensive than treatments for cavities, gum disease, or more serious conditions that may arise if teeth are neglected, he adds.



*Dr. Jeffrey Gross*

The best investment in improving dental appearance and health is to replace old silver fillings with a newer, white bonded filling. Silver is not only unsightly, but can leak and cause fractured teeth and infections. This, in turn, necessitates expensive root canals.

Many lower-cost yet effective cosmetic treatments exist for individuals who want to improve their appearance but can't splurge on higher-end treatments. These include bonding (\$300-\$400 a tooth compared with \$1,200 for Lumineers), wafer-thin porcelain veneers (\$800 a tooth), and "express braces" that improve smiles but not bites

(\$2,000-\$3,500 compared with \$5,000-\$6,000 for traditional braces). Snap-on Smiles, fitted over teeth to produce results within a few months, run \$1,000-\$1,200 instead of the \$15,000-\$50,000 price of full-mouth reconstruction.

### Move It

You can't afford *not* to exercise when times are tough.

"Exercise helps to manage stress and strengthen your immune system," says Frannie Jaye Danzinger, personal trainer and group fitness instructor. "And exercise-induced endorphins help to fight depression.

Exercise also helps to build self-confidence and self-esteem, which can have a positive impact when someone is out of work and dealing with issues."

If a personal trainer or gym membership isn't in your budget, consider no-cost alternatives like speed-walking at the mall or running through the neighborhood or on park trails. Ramp up the intensity with strength-training intervals. "For example, every 100 steps, you can drop for a dozen push-ups or squat thrusts," Danzinger says.

Costing less than \$20, an Xertube is a smart choice for someone who can afford just one fitness apparatus. It's lightweight, portable and used to train every muscle group.

Don't assume you can't afford group classes. Some gyms and community centers offer reasonable drop-in fees, so you can supplement your usual free exercise routine with an occasional class. And many community education departments host group instruction; costs are lower because participation doesn't require gym membership.

Check availability with your city's community education department or recreation center.

### Get a rub-down

Far from being frivolous luxuries, massages offer many health benefits.

"The economy is a great stressor, but massage can be a part of the whole wellness and prevention package because it calms down stress," says Mary Segretario, program manager of massotherapy at the Tri-C Eastern Campus. "Chronic stress leads to all kinds of diseases, like high blood pressure."

Feeling relaxed and rejuvenated after an evening massage helps some clients sleep better, she adds.

People who can't afford salon massages – or would like to supplement some regular salon massages with a less-expensive alternative – turn to Tri-C's Massotherapy Student Clinic. Performed by students under the direct supervision of a licensed massage therapist, the 45-minute, full-body relaxation massage runs just \$25 – no tipping required!

Students, who complete over 1,000 hours of combined classroom and clinical time by the end of the degree program, perform 4,000- 5,000 massages annually.

*Nina Polien Light gets free nightly massages from her 10-year-old daughter.*