

5 items to splurge on

You can find cheaper alternatives, but the health benefits of these goods trump the extra cost. Invest in you!

Ready-to-eat salad greens At my produce market, a 5-ounce container of organic spinach costs more than double what a loose bunch of conventional greens runs. But because the spinach is professionally dried and then stored in an airtight container, it lasts longer, which means I actually eat it all before it wilts.

Dark chocolate An inexpensive milk chocolate bar is like candy crack: Good luck stopping after one piece. A bar with 70 percent cocoa, however, is richer, more satisfying and full of antioxidants. You'll savor an ounce and set aside the rest for later without feeling shorted.

Organic chicken Yes, it's pricey—\$3 more per pound than a conventional bird—but with the jury still out on antibiotics and hormones in regular meat and poultry, I'd rather steer clear. To make organic more affordable, opt for a whole bird (\$4 per pound) instead of only breasts (\$9 per pound). "You can get three or more meals out of one roaster chicken," says Laurie Erickson, author of *Chef By Step*. Plus, cooking chicken with the bones in and skin on helps maintain moisture; just remove fatty skin before eating.

Good cheese Regardless of your pick, fine cheeses (Gouda, Gorgonzola) are a better buy than processed American. "With the pricier stuff, you can get by with eating—and thus buying—less because it has so much more flavor," Conlan says. I splurged on a wedge of Brie (\$7) instead of my usual cheap cheddar (\$3.49 a brick): one slice of Brie hit the spot, compared to the several pieces of cheddar it used to take to make me feel satisfied.

Certain organic produce Thin-skinned fruit and veggies (apples, celery, strawberries, peaches, nectarines, grapes, bell peppers, potatoes and blueberries) and spinach, lettuce and collard greens or kale—aka the dirty dozen—tend to have the highest concentration of pesticides, making it worth the extra moola (50 cents more per pepper at my store, for example) to upgrade to organic.

TALLY TIME

Proof that small steps lead to more bucks in the bank, this reconstructed receipt shows how I saved big with my new supermarket savvy.

I CUT COSTS BY...	I PAID...	I SAVED...	
Shopping at my produce market			Fruit and veggies are cheaper here than at my regular store.
3 red bell peppers	\$3.64	\$2.33	
2 bunches celery	\$2.00	\$1.98	
4 sweet potatoes	\$2.08	\$1.88	
2 bags baby carrots	\$2.58	\$1.40	
1 white onion	\$0.28	\$0.71	
1 piece ginger	\$0.34	\$0.65	
2 cucumbers	\$1.45	\$0.53	
1 bunch dill	\$0.69	\$0.40	
1 grapefruit	\$0.69	\$0.31	
5 apples	\$1.64	\$0.21	
1 bunch parsley	\$0.79	\$0.20	
1 bulb garlic	\$0.60	\$0.19	
2 lemons	\$0.66	\$0.09	
Buying in bulk			
Four-pack meat deal	\$19.98	\$22.85	
1.25 lb ground turkey			Two-for-one (or more) specials on meat are best buys.
1.25 lb ground turkey			
26–30 raw shrimp			
61–70 cooked shrimp			
32 oz nonfat yogurt	\$3.49	\$1.95	Swap single-serve cartons for a big tub.
Buying generic			
1 box bran flakes	\$2.79	\$2.00	Just as tasty as pricier brand names.
1 box oatmeal	\$3.29	\$1.40	
1 jar pasta sauce	\$1.59	\$1.40	
TOTAL SAVINGS.....		\$40.48	

AISLE GUIDE

Your road map for wheeling your cart up to the best deals in every department.

PRODUCE

Break up the bunch. You pay by the pound for most fruit and vegetables, so don't feel required to purchase the prepackaged amount, Conlan says. Pull off only as many bananas as you'll actually eat before they turn brown, and leave behind excess grape clusters to save more and waste less. Likewise, if a store is advertising three of something (kiwifruit, lemons) for 99 cents, know that you don't have to buy three to get the deal. Buy only as many as you need; you'll still pay 33 cents each.

DAIRY

Upsize. It takes only seconds to spoon a serving of yogurt into a reusable container, so it's hard to justify forking over more cash for single-serve containers, say SELF contributing experts Stephanie Clarke, R.D., and Willow Jarosh, R.D. I saved nearly \$2 buying the larger tub. What's more, I could never find single servings of plain yogurt, so I bought flavored, which Clarke and Jarosh reminded me is often loaded with added sugar. Now I mix in my own sliced fresh fruit, which tastes so much better.

MEAT

Take a number. Before grabbing prepackaged lunch meat from the cooler, check out the deli display case. You may have to wait in line, but it's worth your time. At my store, 5 ounces of freshly sliced turkey breast was \$1.74, but 5 ounces of the same brand of turkey prepackaged was \$2.69. (You pay a premium for grab 'n' go convenience.) The deli counter also offers greater selection, including more low-sodium picks, and you buy only what you need—no more tossing expired sandwich fixings.



SAVING SMARTS
Share your best budget tip and get a few new ideas at [Facebook.com/selfmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/selfmagazine).

CASH OUT

If you're having a hard time keeping impulse purchases out of your cart (oh, look, Mallomars!), pay in cash. Research shows we're more careful with our spending when handing over greenbacks than we are when swiping a credit or debit card.

Budget busters

If these items find a home in your kitchen, you may be throwing away money. Discover better bets here.

Microwave popcorn At my store, boxes of nukable corn are almost 25 cents more per ounce than loose kernels. **SUPER SAVER SOLUTION** Drop 2 tbsp kernels into a paper lunch bag (makes 2 to 3 cups popped), fold over the top and microwave two to three minutes, or until the popping stops, Erickson says.

Nonstick cooking spray I found name-brand sprays for \$3.29 and generic for \$2.49. A no-name bottle of heart-healthy canola oil, on the other hand, was \$5.59 for 48 oz. That's nearly 30 cents less per ounce. **SUPER SAVER SOLUTION** Create your own nonstick spray by filling a stainless steel or glass spray bottle with bargain canola or olive oil. I like the Misto Gourmet Olive Oil Sprayer (\$10; BedBathAndBeyond.com). It will set you back a few bucks initially, but you'll net more in the long run.

Vinaigrette salad dressing A bottle of vinaigrette costs me \$3.69 for 8 ounces, or 46 cents per ounce. But a DIY dressing made with bulk red wine vinegar and extra-virgin olive oil comes out to 24 cents per ounce. **SUPER SAVER SOLUTION** A little Dijon helps bind oil and vinegar and adds a tangy zip to homemade dressing. In a jar, combine 1 tbsp mustard with 2 tbsp vinegar, 1 tbsp oil, 1/3 tsp chicken or vegetable broth (optional) and a pinch each salt and freshly ground black pepper. Cover, shake, and voilà! Tasty dressing for two.

Cookies, chips, soda... Snack food and soda add a hefty sum to your bill—and empty calories to your diet. **SUPER SAVER SOLUTION** Limit yourself to one temptation per trip, Clarke and Jarosh suggest. Buy the fun-size candy, but skip the chips and salsa, saving yourself \$2 and who knows how many extra calories. Now that's a sweet deal!

PACKAGED GOODS

Go generic. When it comes to one-ingredient items such as canned beans, rice, oatmeal and dried spices, there's virtually no difference in taste between generic and brand-name options, Miller says. But don't be afraid to experiment with generic versions of multiple-ingredient foods such as cereal and pasta sauce, too: If you don't like something as much as your favorite name brand, ask the store to refund your money; most will if you have a receipt and the original packaging.

FREEZER ITEMS

Frozen isn't always frugal. Compare prices per ounce (whether for Arctic char or zucchini) to see if frozen or fresh is cheapest. A store sale on fresh seafood can trump the frozen price. Likewise, in-season produce usually costs less than its icy counterpart. If you're worried about fresh-food spoilage, spend the money for frozen—better to shell out an additional 50 cents now than to throw away \$3 in rotting food later. My smoothie cravings may come and go, but the berries in my freezer will be good all winter.