

CAN YOU AFFORD TO EAT LOW CARB? CAN YOU AFFORD NOT TO?

I recently received a question from someone who was switching to low-carb after experiencing constant hunger on a low-fat diet. She was concerned about "the enormous consumption of animal products and fats" that she would be eating on her new regimen, especially considering the poor quality of the products she could find at the local supermarkets. Good, free-range poultry and eggs and pasture-fed beef were not in her budget and ordering online made them even more expensive by adding shipping charges.

It is a fact of life that food costs more, just when many of us have had to tighten our belts due to the recession, and good meat, dairy, and poultry is not always easy to find at any price.

First let me point out that those of us who follow a reduced carbohydrate way of life do not eat more meat than we did before. It becomes a larger PERCENTAGE of our diet because we eat less overall. I still eat the same steak, two chops, or one hamburger that I always did. I don't eat two or three steaks or dozens of burgers. Starch and sugar make you hungry. Fat and protein actually reduce the total number of calories needed to keep you feeling satisfied. Gary Taubes, author of *Good Calories, Bad Calories*, said that studies showed that those who cut down on carbs ate less, but that it was important to remember that "no one was telling them to eat less!"

It seems intuitive that if you stop eating cheap foods like bread, pasta, rice, and potatoes, you will spend more, but if you take a closer look at what most Americans are buying, you will see a very different picture. All those brand-name products are not cheap. Most of the money invested in the production of sugary breakfast cereals, frozen dinners, chips, cookies, baked goods, and convenience foods comes from advertising and packaging. The cost of their actual content is negligible. And don't get me started about soft drinks! A cola in a restaurant costs about two bucks. For what? Some flavored, colored water, a whopping slug of sugar, and a peppy advertising slogan. Carbonated beverages are now the number one source of calories in the standard American diet! Cut out all bottled or canned beverages and add up the savings, not just in your grocery bill or restaurant tab, but also the money you'll save on medicine and dental and doctor bills over a lifetime. (Another bonus—when you stop drinking a sweet beverage with every meal, you will probably notice that everything tastes sweeter. You can reset your sweet meter and reduce your cravings for sugar by replacing sweetened drinks with plain water or tea.)

But I digress. Let me get back to the original question about economical and healthful protein foods. I'm dealing with the same problem as the lady who posed the question. I live in a rural area and have been meaning to see if I could find pastured beef from a local farmer, but I don't have a big freezer and can't buy a whole side unless I can find someone to share it. I do try to buy good ground beef—it's not as expensive as the better cuts, and although my local stores don't
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have grass-fed ground beef, they do have brands that are hormone-free, all-natural, and not treated with antibiotics. I still buy steaks at Costco, but we don't eat them that often, so I don't worry too much about it.

Another option is buffalo. Buffalo is becoming more available and it is about the same price as beef, at least around here. It is pastured and not raised on feedlots. Another good red meat is lamb. It is not raised like beef either. And since it is younger, it won't have had time to build up toxicity. Ground lamb and lamb stew meat would be the best bargains. I've started to order lamb when I eat out, when it is on the menu.

What are called *variety meats* is another way to go. Chicken livers are very healthful and very inexpensive. (Organic, free-range chickens have livers too, so they must be available somewhere!)

Wild fish is also good, and frozen fish isn't as pricey as fresh. Some, like halibut is always wild and it is a cold-water fish—the tropical fish are more likely to have heavy metals and toxins. Better yet, are little fish like sardines. Even the canned ones are full of good fats. I've been trying to learn to like them. Canned tuna (not albacore) is also a pretty good deal.

And don't forget eggs! The only good thing about the mistaken idea that cholesterol is evil is that it has kept the price of eggs down for those of us who recognize the value of one of nature's most perfect foods.