

Eat Well in Tough Times by Shopping Smarter

Romancing The Stove

With the Grammy Guru

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Hello smart shoppers. In my column, I try to ignore the terrible economy. Forgive me, it's time to smarten up. According to the experts, people are getting heavier as they look for any way to feed their families, especially with fast (cheap) foods.

I've said before, let's start getting smart again by saving money in the supermarket. Ground beef literally flies off the shelf in tough times. You can make the least expensive meals with ground beef, or can you? You look for cheap and buy those "fantastic" buys, ground beef at under \$3 a pound. That's nuts, it's almost half fat! Stop!

After browning the meat and pouring off the fat, you're left with about ½ pound. The cuts of beef that contain the least amount of fat and cholesterol are: flank steak, eye round, top round, bottom round, sirloin tip or steak and lean chuck.

Some stores offer buy one get one free frequently. Any of these cuts can be used for ground beef. I prefer bottom round roast for grinding. It's lean, good tasting and frequently on sale. Pick a lean one and bring it to the butchers at the meat counter. Tell them what you want. They are the nicest and most accommodating people in the store. Tell them you want the meat ground twice. You decide: Low fat? Grind as is. Very low fat? Trim most of the fat. Virtually fat free? Trim all the fat.

Do you want it portioned out? They will package it for you. Ask them to portion the trimmed fat separately, then you know it has been trimmed and just how much fat you've kept out of your diet.

Now you've become a smart shopper. You will end up, after cooking, with just about what you started with; good, lean, fresh ground beef.

In most casserole dishes, you can use less meat than you usually would since there is no waste. Give back the good fat by adding 1 or 2 tablespoons olive or canola oil to each pound of meat.

When you shop you must pay attention to labels. Many additions, such as Hamburger Helper, contain fat, cholesterol and a great deal of salt, not to mention fancy words for MSG. Not only does it add things you don't need in your diet, it also costs just about as much as the meat.

That bottom round roast also makes a delicious roast beef or pot roast and if you ask the butcher, he will also make you cubed steaks.

I cringe when I see people buying pork neck bones. Why are you paying money for bones when you can barely feed your family meat?

Buy a pork shoulder, trim the fat and cut it up. Want pork chops? Buy a loin of pork when it's on sale and have the butcher cut it into chops. Take advantage of buy one get one free on a boneless pork loin. You can cut it into cutlets, chops, double chops, roasts and stew meat.

It makes me laugh when we constantly hear, "eat at least five fresh fruits and vegetables daily." Right now the prices are untouchable for many. Remember, a vegetable is fresh when it's sold or eaten no more than two days after picking. After that, you lose vitamins daily.

Frozen is cheaper and packaged the same day it is picked. Canned veggies are still much, much cheaper and packaged the same day they're picked; still loaded with vitamins. Look for no salt added. Try to buy store brands. Who do you think makes them? If you said the big guys, you're right.

Drain and puree' canned veggies such as carrots, beans, green beans, anything you can think of and mix it with the ground meat. They'll never know the difference, you're stretching the meat and feeding them healthy food.

Five fruits a day? On what planet? I remember years ago raising four kids saying, "I just want to be rich enough to keep my family in bananas." Including me and my husband, that's 49 bananas a week. However, store-brand canned fruits prepared in pear juice or light syrup solve the problem.

Oatmeal is great, but the old fashioned, not the instant, has the most nutrition. Forget the instant flavored ones; expensive junk. You can add applesauce, cinnamon, maple syrup, brown sugar, nuts or whatever and a container of store-bought oatmeal can feed an army. Pay attention, think, think, think. Until next week, God's blessings.

Visit www.romancingthe.stove.net or email Arlene@romancingthestove.net.