When it comes to eating on a budget, planning is important. Making meals at home is more nutritious and generally cheaper than eating out. Here are some steps to help you in your planning process.

**Step 1: Create a Budget**
Take a look at your finances and decide how much you can afford to spend on food. You can base it on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly amount. Write this number down and keep track of it.

**Step 2: Get Ideas**
Come up with ideas of what meals and snacks you like to eat. You can get ideas from family and friends, cookbooks, and from countless recipes on the internet. Choose meals you are able and willing to make, but don’t be afraid to try and learn something new!

**Step 3: Plan Your Meals & Make a Shopping List**
Before you plan your meals, take inventory of what food items you already have. Plan your meals around the items you already have and make a list of the ingredients you need. Plan meals and snacks that will help you have a balanced diet. Use nutritious but less expensive items in your meals such as rice, beans, carrots, potatoes, apples, bananas, eggs, and less expensive cuts of meat. Frozen veggies can also be a great option as they are quick, nutritious, keep for weeks, and are inexpensive. Include meals like stews, slow cooker meals, casseroles, or stir-fries that “stretch” expensive ingredients (e.g. meat) into more portions. Take advantage of coupons and sales; use these to help you plan your menu as well.

**Step 4: Go Shopping**
Take the list you made with you to the grocery store. Check items off the list as you put them in your cart. As you go, add up the prices of the foods you are picking up. This will help you stay within budget. Use “cost per unit” prices (located right by the item price) to help you compare prices of different brands and product sizes. If your budget allows, buy one treat that is not on your list. Again, make sure to take advantage of coupons, sales, and price matching.

**Step 5: Make Your Meals and Enjoy**
A helpful planning tip is to prepare meals, or parts of meals, ahead of time. Chop up veggies and fruit and put in containers for a ready-made snack or side. Cook and shred some chicken to use in salads, sandwiches, or dinners for the next few days. Prepare large batches of your favorite meals and individually freeze them for later use. Cook larger portions and enjoy leftovers throughout the week. Don’t forget to find joy and satisfaction in creating and eating good food!