

Rethinking the Raw Budget **by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt**

We've recently had a shift in our finances. This shift spurred a family conversation about ways to rethink our food-buying and food-prepping habits. I'm a firm believer in including children in discussions about money. Many parents don't do this – either out of fear of vulnerability or not feeling their kids will “get it.” Money only has as much power as we give it, so discussing finances with kids is a great way to rethink how money affects us individually and as a family. Also, being up front with our kids about our financial situation helps them understand current limits, encourages creativity around ways to save and spend, and, most importantly, keeps family communication open. Children usually approach the subject of finances unburdened and can offer some solutions from angles we'd never considered.

During our conversation on rethinking our food habits, all three of us contributed ideas. We came up with some new ones, but also realized that we were already doing quite a bit to cut costs. Below are a few of our favorite recommendations.

- **Buy quality kitchen gear.** What kitchen gear do you use the most? A blender? A knife? A juicer? If you're using a low-end blender, for example, chances are you're going to burn it out making smoothies soon. A friend of mine went through 3 \$30 blenders in one year before finally deciding to invest in a high-end blender. Though the initial cost may be daunting at first, you'll end up with an appliance that will give you years of service without the hassle. Start with the most-used piece of equipment and replace that one first and then move to the next.
- **Simple meals.** When my family first started transitioning to a raw food diet, we made tons of lovely gourmet meals. We soon found that we couldn't keep up financially – not to mention the indigestion we were experiencing from all that rich food! We then began to transition to less gourmet and more simple: salads, soups, smoothies, puddings, and veggies with dip. One thing I noticed was that I was enjoying the food more; it was just me and that mango as opposed to the mango being disguised as some faux SAD food. Reclaim your food! It doesn't have to be made into something else. Appreciate it for what it is.
- **Buy local.** On our way to the spring the other day, my husband and I stopped at our local health food store to restock our honey. As we looked more closely at the label, we realized that this particular apiary was right down the street from the spring we were going to. My husband called them to see if we could stop by and they said yes. What a treat this was! We spent some time with the owner and learned how he processes his organic raw honey. And the prices! We've been buying our 6-pound jar of honey at the health food store for about \$30. Buying it from the beekeeper directly only cost us \$18! In Maine, there is a local foods association (<http://www.eatmainefoods.org/>) that has information on who's selling what. I would assume every state has something like this. Do some tooling around on the web. It's definitely worth the time spent and the money saved.

- **Buy in bulk.** I search around on the Internet constantly for the best prices on foods. I also order bulk items through my local health food store. When you do this, it saves them on repackaging and they will usually give you a nice discount. Think about the items that your family consumes the most. Are they items that will keep well if ordered in bulk? Do you have the storage space for them? If so, then buying in bulk may be for you. If the initial price is daunting, order with a friend and split the costs. I can't order tons of bulk items at a time, so I'll do a rotation: one month I'll get chia seeds, another month, cacao butter and cacao powder, etc. Getting on a good rotation so that I always have what I need took me about a year or so, so you'll need to be patient with this process.
- **Make your own convenience foods and comfort foods.** My kid and I used to find ourselves at friend's houses or out running errands without food. Or we would be at home, moaning about how “there's nothing to eat” and would end up going out. We never really thought about it at the time, but those all add up to big money-drainers. Now we make sure that we always carry food with us and that it's food we love (that's very important). We pack things like crackers and nut or seed butters, chocolates, juicy fruits, cut-up veggies, and plenty of drinks. This way, we don't get caught out with nothing but our wallets to feed us.

I'm a big advocate for revisiting your food-buying and food-prepping habits often. In many instances we get into habits that may have worked for us in the past, but are now no longer applicable. Feeling comfortable with the process will ensure that should we encounter a financial shift, we won't immediately go into panic mode and feel compelled to make drastic changes that will bring us outside our comfort levels.

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