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DR  FISCHER  
THE PARK AVENUE DIET

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### **Eating right might be costly, but it's more expensive in the long run to be overweight**

By *Natalie Neysa Alund*

Shopping for healthy food can be cumbersome and costly for Bradenton mom Amber Foley.

That's because the 26-year-old's 1-year-old son, Alexander, is diabetic.

"I have to buy fresh items more than canned because the canned has added sugar and if you want items with no added sugar it's more expensive," Foley said. "Diabetics have a higher risk of acquiring heart disease and have to watch their fat intake."

That means she buys lean cuts of meat which are more expensive.

Other items like pasta, generally inexpensive, are also pricey for Foley.

That's because she buys whole wheat pasta, often more pricey, to avoid those extra carbohydrates that turn into sugar.

"I have to make stuff homemade," she said. "I can't just buy Kraft Macaroni and Cheese because it affects my son's sugar levels. Shopping healthy is definitely expensive."

Healthy, not costly

Eating healthy can be costly but it doesn't have to be, said Bradenton-based dietitian and nutritionist LuAnne Howard.

"The more pre-planning you do, the more money you are going to save," Howard said.

She recommends grabbing coupons from the newspaper or the Internet and preparing a list before visiting the store.

And she recommends looking out for those sales.

"Simply watch the weekly fliers that come out," Howard said. "You might have to shop at different stores you are not used to, but it works."

Don't rule out buying inexpensive items like pasta either, she said.

"You can take some of those inexpensive foods, like pasta, and up the nutrition by adding vegetables and lean meats," Howard said.

Just use less meat, she said.

"If you want lean ground beef, wait until it goes on sale and buy a large portion and freeze it so you have it in the future," Howard said. "Don't buy the ground chunk just because it's on sale; it's bad for you."

Look for seafood, which is low in saturated fat, at stores like Albertsons, she said.

"It (Albertsons) often has salmon and other seafood on sale," Howard said.

Want fresh veggies?

Go to the flea market, Howard said.

"They have everything under the sun and it's cheap," she said. "And, not only are you getting it for less money, you're supporting your local growers."

Regarding lettuce, buy a head instead of bagged lettuce. Cut lettuce deteriorates quicker, Howard said.

Don't always buy store brands. Like with low-fat dairy products, look for the sales, she said. Sometimes store brands are less expensive but sometimes you can catch a brand name for a better price.

Food preparation is also important, she said.

The healthiest way to cook is grilling and baking, she said.

"If you are sauteing food make sure you saute it in a healthy fat like olive oil," Howard said.

"A dollar here, a dollar there really adds up," Howard said.

Being overweight can be costly

➡ Unhealthy eating leads to obesity, which can lead to other medical issues and can be pricey, said Stuart Fischer, a diet doctor based out of New York.

"The high cost of being overweight can have drastic effects on people's finances," said Fischer, author of the *The Park Avenue Diet*. "Being overweight will not only cost you time by reducing your lifespan; it will also cost you serious amounts of money."

According to Fischer, here are a few increased costs paid by overweight Americans:

- n Medical costs: Among the obese, the lifetime medical costs including doctor's visits and medications related to diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, hypertension and stroke are \$10,000 more than an individual at a healthy weight.

- n Everyday necessities: Those struggling with their weight are likely to not only spend more money on food, but also on clothing because their size can constantly change.

- n Work performance and job security: Studies show being healthy and exercising can improve employee moral, reduce stress and improve performance, making you a more valuable employee and adding to job security.

- n Life and health insurance premiums: Those overweight typically pay life insurance premiums that are two to four times as expensive as the average person.

- n Higher travel costs: Many airlines now charge overweight people for two seats.

According to information from the Centers for Disease Control, 34 percent of Americans are now defined as obese and 33 percent are defined as overweight.

It costs \$19.39 in added health care costs for every pound you are overweight, according to a study released last month from the CDC.

"Obesity leads to high cholesterol, diabetes and high blood pressure with almost 60 percent certainty and these illnesses are expensive," Fischer said. "When you have illnesses that affect your circulation and your well being, you will not be able to go to work every day and you will have doctor visits that are time consuming, that take away from your job and involve expensive prescriptions."

The American College of Physicians calculated that the monthly bill for someone with diabetes is \$800 worth of prescriptions.

"We're talking about six or seven different medicines," Fischer said.

It cost Foley about \$150 a month to purchase diabetes medicine for her son, diagnosed with Type I diabetes at age six months. "And that's with health insurance," Foley said.

Bradenton resident Betsy Rafferty was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 1990 after the birth of her third son. She said her insulin cost her about \$25 a month and another medicine she takes to keep her sugar levels constant costs about \$34 a month.

Her doctor told her eating healthy and exercising is the best thing for her.

The more weight you can lose, the less medicine you are taking and the more money you save, Rafferty said.

In addition, cholesterol and blood pressure medicines are recommended at the same time for someone with diabetes, Fischer said. "That's because for a diabetic, cholesterol that would seem normal for you and me is actually high, so the American College of Physicians recommends that a person's cholesterol be as low as possible," Fischer said.

Fischer said the only way to beat the odds that 95 percent of diets fail long term is to make a comprehensive change in your lifestyle, not just your eating habits. In addition to healthy eating, he recommends exercise.

"If people in the United States don't get their weight under control, their personal health care bubble will pop, drastically affecting their finances and their quality of life," Fischer said.

Stuart, who has practiced medicine for 27 years, said people will save thousands of dollars each year if they just take off those extra pounds.