

Budget-Friendly Cheat Sheet: Simple, Real Food Swaps

1. Swap Sugary Cereal for Eggs or Oats

What to avoid:

- Processed, sugary cereals (e.g., Froot Loops, Lucky Charms).

What to do instead:

- **Eggs** (even basic, inexpensive ones) scrambled or boiled.
- **Old-fashioned oats** with a sprinkle of cinnamon and a few nuts or seeds.
- If eggs are out of the budget, consider **cottage cheese** with fruit.

Why it's better:

- Eggs are an affordable source of **protein** and **healthy fats**. Oats are inexpensive and packed with **fiber**. Both keep your child full longer than sugary cereal, preventing blood sugar spikes. ****Be Aware that Oats can contain high levels of glyphosate (AKA: Round-UP weed-killer), choose organic if possible to reduce glyphosate exposure.**
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2. Swap Bread for Frozen Vegetables and Canned Beans

What to avoid:

- **White bread, white rice**, or processed snacks that are carb-heavy (e.g., white pasta, chips).

What to do instead:

- **Frozen vegetables** (e.g., spinach, broccoli, mixed veggies). These are often cheaper than fresh and last longer.
- **Canned beans** (look for low-sodium options) or **lentils** for plant-based protein.

Why it's better:

- Frozen veggies are a **budget-friendly** and nutrient-packed option. Beans and lentils are a **cheap source of fiber, protein, and iron**—and they help fill kids up without expensive carbs.
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3. Swap Processed Meats for Budget-Friendly Cuts of Meat

What to avoid:

- Processed meats like hot dogs, deli meats, sausages (e.g., Oscar Mayer, packaged deli meat).

What to do instead:

- **Ground beef** or **chicken thighs** (cheaper than chicken breasts).
- **Canned tuna** or **canned salmon** (check for BPA-free cans if concerned).
- **Eggs** or **cottage cheese** as an alternative protein.

Why it's better:

- Ground beef and chicken thighs are **more affordable** and provide **high-quality protein** and **healthy fats**. Canned tuna or salmon offers **omega-3s** and **protein** on a budget.
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4. Swap Sugary Drinks for Water and Homemade Lemonade

What to avoid:

- Soda, juice, or sweetened iced tea (e.g., Coca-Cola, Tropicana juice).

What to do instead:

- **Water** (infused with lemon, cucumber, or berries for flavor).
- **Homemade lemonade** with **lemon juice**, a little **honey**, and **water** (no added sugar).

Why it's better:

- Sugary drinks contribute **empty calories** and **blood sugar spikes**. Water is **free**, and homemade lemonade is an affordable, healthy alternative.
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5. Swap Packaged Snacks for Whole Fruits and Nuts

What to avoid:

- Pre-packaged snacks like chips, cookies, or granola bars (e.g., Nature Valley bars, potato chips).

What to do instead:

- **Whole fruits** like apples, bananas, and oranges.
- **Peanuts**, **almonds**, or **sunflower seeds** (buy in bulk for savings).
- If on a tight budget, consider **popcorn** (plain, air-popped) as a healthy snack.

Why it's better:

- Whole fruits provide **fiber, vitamins, and natural sugars** without the crash of processed sugars. Nuts and seeds are affordable sources of **protein** and **healthy fats**.
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6. Swap Processed Pasta for Zucchini Noodles or Rice

What to avoid:

- **White pasta, ramen noodles, or any refined pasta** (e.g., Kraft Mac & Cheese).

What to do instead:

- **Zucchini noodles (zoodles) or cauliflower rice** (can make at home with a grater or food processor).
- **Brown rice or quinoa** (buy in bulk for savings).

Why it's better:

- Zucchini noodles and cauliflower rice are **low-carb, nutrient-dense alternatives** to refined pasta. Brown rice is more **nutrient-rich** than white rice, providing fiber and vitamins.
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7. Swap Sugary Snacks for Boiled Eggs or Cheese

What to avoid:

- Packaged sugary snacks, granola bars, or cookies (e.g., granola bars, fruit snacks).

What to do instead:

- **Boiled eggs or cheese sticks** (easy, protein-packed snacks).
- **Carrot sticks with hummus** or a handful of **nuts**.

Why it's better:

- Eggs are a **cheap, high-quality protein**. Cheese and nuts provide healthy fats that will keep your child full longer than sugary snacks.
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8. Swap Fast Food for Homemade Burgers or Stir-Fry

What to avoid:

- Fast food (e.g., burgers, fries, fried chicken).

What to do instead:

- **Homemade burgers** with **ground beef** or **chicken** patties (add **spinach** or other veggies into the patties for extra nutrition).
- **Stir-fry** with **frozen vegetables** and **chicken, beef, or tofu**.

Why it's better:

- Fast food is **loaded with unhealthy fats** and preservatives. Homemade meals let you **control ingredients**, providing healthier fats and **more vegetables**.
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9. Swap Bottled Salad Dressings for Olive Oil and Vinegar

What to avoid:

- Bottled dressings with added sugar and preservatives (e.g., ranch, Italian dressing).

What to do instead:

- **Olive oil** and **vinegar** (or lemon juice) with a pinch of salt and pepper.
- **Avocado** as a creamy dressing alternative.

Why it's better:

- Pre-made dressings are often **full of sugar** and **bad fats**. Olive oil and vinegar are much healthier and provide **heart-healthy fats**.
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10. Swap Processed Granola Bars for Oats and Nut Butter

What to avoid:

- Granola bars or protein bars with added sugars (e.g., Nature Valley bars, Clif bars).

What to do instead:

- **Oats** with a spoonful of **peanut butter** or **almond butter**.
- **Homemade energy balls** made with oats, peanut butter, and a bit of honey or chocolate chips.

Why it's better:

- Pre-packaged bars can be loaded with sugar. Oats with nut butter are a more **affordable, filling snack** that provides good fats and fiber.

Recap of Affordable Swaps

What to Avoid	What to Do Instead
Sugary cereal	Eggs or oats (organic) with fruit
White bread and pasta	Frozen vegetables (organic) , canned beans, or brown rice
Processed meats	Ground beef, chicken thighs, canned tuna or salmon
Sugary drinks	Water or homemade lemonade
Packaged snacks (chips, cookies)	Whole fruits, nuts, boiled eggs, or cheese sticks
Fast food	Homemade burgers, stir-fries, or simple casseroles
Bottled salad dressings	Avocado oil or *pure olive oil and vinegar, or avocado
Granola bars	Oats (organic) with nut butter or homemade energy balls

Remember to reach each label carefully! Aim for organic if possible. Avoid seed oils such as corn, soybean, canola oil, safflower oil, sunflower oil, etc. because these are highly processed and can cause inflammation in some individuals. Avoid olive oil unless you are certain of where it is from and how it is sourced. *Due to labelling laws, some olive oils sold in the USA can be “cut” or diluted with toxic seed oils and the label does not have to reflect that fact.

Avoiding seed oils—such as soybean, corn, canola, and sunflower oil—is important because they are high in omega-6 fatty acids, which, when consumed in excess, can promote chronic inflammation in the body. While omega-6s are essential in small amounts, modern diets often contain far too much, disrupting the healthy omega-3 to omega-6 balance and increasing the risk of inflammatory-related conditions like heart disease, obesity, and autoimmune disorders. Reducing seed oil intake helps support better overall health and a more balanced inflammatory response.

Here are two scientific article titles RE Seed Oils with their links:

1. *Health implications of high dietary omega-6 polyunsaturated Fatty acids* — <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22570770/> PubMed
2. *n-6 High Fat Diet Induces Gut Microbiome Dysbiosis and Colonic Inflammation* — <https://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/22/13/6919>