



**Yes, you can eat well for less money.**

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kind to your wallet.

- Clip coupons or go online to look for discounts on the products you use most.

### Shop smart

● Stick to your list. Resist the urge to browse aisles or pick up “extras” at checkout.

● Buy in bulk and store in ready-to-use portions. Split with a friend if storage space is limited.

● Go generic. Buying the store’s brand of canned, frozen or bagged foods can be nutritious *and*

economical.

- Take advantage of fresh fruits and vegetables in season.

### Cook once, eat twice

● Streeetch! Leftovers from a roasted chicken at dinner can be reinvented the next day as chicken salad.

- Leftover vegetables can give canned soups, rice or pasta a nutritional boost.

- Double up on recipes. Freeze in oven-ready containers to use later in the week for quick meals.

### Make the cut

While precleaned and precut produce can save time and energy in the kitchen, they can also be more expensive. Go for whole fruits and vegetables and cut them up yourself. Chop and package them in common portion sizes, or slice and store them for an easy snack.

### Be a savvy snacker

Healthy snacking can be your best friend in managing fatigue. However, single-serving snack foods can be costly. Create your own individual snack packs in advance so you can “grab & go.”

### Be your own “takeout”

Restaurant and convenience foods can quickly chew into your budget. Pack lunches in reusable and insulated containers for you and your family.

Denise Nowack, RD, is executive vice president of Chapter Programs for the Southern California Chapter.

## DIET

# Healthy eating on a budget

by Denise Nowack, RD

Eating well doesn’t have to take a bite out of your budget. Here are some ways to help keep money in your pocket without compromising your health.

### Have a plan

● Search the Internet for healthy recipe ideas using budget-conscious ingredients. Use ingredients as keywords.

● Create a master shopping list to keep your refrigerator and pantry filled with items that are quick and easy to cook, and

## Budget-friendly ingredients

- Pastas
- Grains (like quinoa, couscous, brown rice)
- Canned beans (a great source of fiber and protein)
- Soups (choose reduced-sodium varieties)
- Canned and frozen fish
- Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Nonfat powdered milk (use when milk is needed as an ingredient)



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## CAM Wise choices in action: The example of acai

by Allen C. Bowling, MD, PhD

To illustrate the CAM decision-making process, this article discusses acai berries, a CAM therapy in the public eye recently that is used by some people with MS. But the decision-making process described here should be the same for **any** product taken by mouth. It means a careful review of claims and available facts about safety and effectiveness.

### What is acai?

Acai (pronounced “AH-sigh-EE”) berries are the fruit of a South American palm tree, known scientifically as **Euterpe oleracea**. The juice from these berries is available in many different products, some in grocery stores and others only through specific distributors. There has been intense marketing of acai recently. In the past, annual sales were typically about \$500,000. In 2008, this number rose to \$15 million.

### Claims

In terms of biochemical effects, acai berries are claimed to contain compounds that fight free radicals and thus have antioxidant properties. In terms of clinical effects, acai-berry products are said to produce weight loss, improve general health, “support” the immune system, and be beneficial for many different diseases.

### Safety information

No rigorous studies have evaluated the safety of acai products in people with MS, nor in the general population. In South America, consuming acai has been associated with Chagas disease, a parasitic infection of the intestines, but in the United States there are no similar reports. It is always important to have safety information about any product taken by mouth. This applies to food products such as acai and to dietary supplements and medications.

### Effectiveness information

Acai has been shown to have antioxidant effects in scientific studies. It has produced variable results in studies designed to determine its effect on the immune system. It is important to keep in mind that these are laboratory studies. To determine whether a therapy is effective for a specific disease, it must be studied in controlled clinical trials involving many people with that specific disease.

To evaluate the effectiveness of an MS therapy, studies are typically done first in an animal model of MS, known as experimental allergic encephalomyelitis (EAE). If it is effective in EAE, it may then undergo controlled trials in people with MS. There are no reports in the medical literature of acai effects in lab animals with EAE or in people with MS. In fact, there are no published reports of well-designed clinical studies of acai use in any medical condition. It's a blank slate.

### Additional concerns

What is known is that serious concerns about the marketing of acai products have been raised by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). The BBB warns that consumers should be wary of advertisements about acai products, especially online. Some companies have made it appear that TV personalities Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Mehmet Oz have endorsed their acai products. Winfrey and Oz claim that they have not—and have filed a lawsuit about unauthorized endorsements against some 50 different companies producing acai and other products.

The “free trial period” is another BBB concern. Companies offer acai-berry products this way but the duration of the trial may not be clear—and it may be difficult to contact a

**As discussed in the Winter 2009–10 issue, decisions about using complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) require critical thinking—and some research.**

company to discontinue delivery of—and charges for—the product after the free trial is over.

### Adding it up

For acai products the summary looks like this: no safety studies and no studies of effectiveness in MS. Plus serious concerns about the marketing and sales approaches of some of the companies that sell acai products.

### Putting it in a larger perspective

When considering any therapy, it is essential to know why one would use a particular therapy and how that therapy compares to others that are claimed to have the same beneficial effect. Checking reliable sources for clinical trial results and for any complaints about marketing practices is also essential.

The fact that there is no safety information and no MS-specific effectiveness information about acai-berry products raises serious concern, especially as these products are generally considered for daily long-term use. Acai might eventually be found to have some benefits in MS. But it could also be found to be ineffective or even unsafe. With so little information, acai is a complete unknown.

Not all CAMs are like that. There is safety and effectiveness information on many unconventional as well as conventional therapies for MS. Some of them are known to be low risk and some are known to be definitely or possibly effective. Choosing therapies for which there is information is far more reasonable than taking a risk on those about which little or nothing is known. The Society booklet, **Clear Thinking About Alternative Therapies**, offers practical ways to evaluate benefits and risks ([nationalMSSociety.org/stayingwell](http://nationalMSSociety.org/stayingwell)). Another place to start is my Web site: [neurology.care.net](http://neurology.care.net).

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Additional information about unconventional medicine may be found in his highly recommended

book, **Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Multiple Sclerosis** (2nd edition, Demos Medical Publishing).

