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Food prices have spiked 25% since 2019. Here's how Long Islanders are making every dollar count at the grocery store.

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By **Brianne Ledda**

brianne.ledda@newsday.com [X @brianne_ledda](https://twitter.com/brianne_ledda)

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Licensed nutritionist Caitlin Self started her popular food blog [Frugal Nutrition](#) in 2013, creating a go-to resource for healthy eaters on a budget.

But in the past year or so, the growing cost of groceries has pushed her to update prices for old recipes, she said.

"I had one or two that were four times the cost now, which is such a shame," she said.

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A recipe for [salmon seaweed rolls](#), for example, cost \$3.12 when she first posted it online in 2015 but now costs \$12.95 to make. Another recipe for [chicken burrito bowls](#) first published in 2015 cost \$3.95 to make, and now costs \$9.91.

Tips from experts on how to save money

1. Use your freezer for storage for produce, meat and bread.
2. Buy in season, buy frozen, and buy dry ingredients like fava beans or brown rice.
3. Avoid brand-name and packaged snacks, which tend to be costlier.
4. Coupons are great, but make sure you aren't spending more on gas than you'd save.
5. Keep some easy recipes on hand with few ingredients, such as whole grain toast with nut butter and fresh berries, or cottage cheese with seasonal fruit on top.

Sources: *Caitlin Self, Eleana Kaidanian, Deborah Cohn, Dani Spies*

Her free website has seen steady or increasing traffic over the years as shoppers across the country, including on Long Island, continue looking for help juggling tighter food budgets.

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Across Long Island, families are rethinking how they shop, cook and stretch every dollar as inflation, supply chain disruptions, global conflicts and other factors continue to drive up the cost of living. From meal planning to coupon cutting, residents are finding creative ways to adapt, while experts warn the financial strain shows little sign of easing.

Eight in 10 Long Islanders said the cost of groceries is causing a very serious or serious financial hardship each month, according to an [April poll](#) from Siena College. Food prices in the New York metro region rose 25.2% in 2024 compared to 2019, [according to a report](#) published by the state comptroller's office in April.

The report found that food costs for downstate New Yorkers, including Long Islanders, in 2022-23 totaled around \$11,288 a year, exceeding the national average of \$9,664, [Newsday has reported](#).

The state report attributes increases to [global supply chain issues](#) caused by the pandemic, and events like the [war in Ukraine](#) and an outbreak of [avian flu](#).

Factors like inflation, weather and climate change also have contributed to historically high grocery prices in recent years, [Newsday has reported](#), prompting more Long Islanders [to seek assistance](#) at food pantries.

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"Once you have high inflation, the price ... just stays high," said Stony Brook University economics professor Juan Carlos Conesa. "Even if inflation goes down, it only means that prices are not going up so fast as they used to. But it doesn't mean prices are going down."

[Inflation rates in recent years hit 9%](#), he said, among the highest levels seen since the 1980s.

The food price index increased 8.8% in 2022 from 2021, according to the comptroller's report, which called the increase the "highest growth in over 40 years." During that year, food products on a national level saw high price growth, including a 32.2% increase for eggs; an 18.5% increase for fats and oils; a 12% increase for dairy, processed fruits and vegetables; and a 9.6% increase in meats, poultry and fish. The food price index measures the change in price for a basket of food.

Local food prices grew 1.8% in 2024 from 2023, lower than the 2.3% national increase, the report said.

Average annual household food costs in the NYC metro area

Compared to 2012-2013, in 2022-2023, the average household spent **56.2%** more on total food costs, including **65.8%** more on food at home and **43.6%** more on food away from home.



More recently, in May, the cost of cereal rose 6.6%, and prices for meat, poultry and eggs rose 6.2% compared to the same period last year, according to the most recent data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Prices for fruits and vegetables, however, dropped 1.6% in May, [Newsday has reported](#).

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Average annual household spending by food type in the NYC metro area

	2012-2013	2018-2019	2022-2023	% change, 2012-2013 to 2022-2023
Cereals and bakery products	\$590	\$710	\$918	55.6%
Meats, poultry, fish and eggs	\$988	\$1,323	\$1,513	53.1%
Dairy products	\$442	\$539	\$672	52.0%
Fruits and vegetables	\$855	\$1,145	\$1,394	63.0%

Source: [Office of the New York State Comptroller](#)



Especially with shifting tariff rates, there's too much uncertainty to know how inflation might look in the near future, Conesa said.

Struggling with high food costs

"Everybody is feeling it when they go to the grocery store, whether it's the cost of eggs or anything else," said Salaam Bhatti, SNAP director at the nonprofit Food Research and Action Center, based in Washington, D.C.

On Long Island, an additional 65,000 people sought assistance at food bank Long Island Cares in 2023-24, [Newsday has reported](#), a 30% increase from the estimated 221,000 already using the nonprofit's services in 2022-2023.

"Food is an interesting thing because it's what we call the fungible part of the budget," said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and CEO at Island Harvest. "It's about, what time of the month are you asking the question?"

Some families might prioritize other bills and expenses over food, such as rent and transportation, and cut down on meals or try to stretch food longer, she said. "Everybody's situation is different."

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Nonprofits like Island Harvest have raised the alarm about the proposed federal budget, which, if passed, would make deep cuts to the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), which helps low-income families buy groceries, including more than 184,374 Long Islanders.

"People who receive SNAP benefits are often having to choose between rent, and bills, and whether or not they're going to get to eat that day," Bhatti said. "And we know that rent eats first."

Finding ways to save

For Long Islanders looking to save on groceries, a first step would be to get back to the kitchen and start with the basics, said Eleana Kaidanian, a registered dietitian who runs the virtual practice Long Island Nutritionist. Relying on takeout and preprepared food is a costly habit.

"It sounds a little silly but a lot of clients will say, 'I don't know how to cut a pineapple, so I buy the cut pineapple,'" she said, adding that cut fruit is more expensive and doesn't last as long. "You can learn that and save money."

Households should also plan out meals and snacks ahead of time, she said. "By the time you're hungry it's too late."

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Wasted food, even food bought on sale, is "still money going down the drain," Kaidanian said. It's also worth being open to cheaper alternatives, like buying carrots instead of bok choy.

One meal-planning hack is to build two or three "core, go-to" recipes that can be built on throughout the week using other pantry staples, said Dani Spies, an eating psychologist and weight loss coach based in Bergen County, New Jersey. She is also founder of the affordable food blog Clean and Delicious.

Double up meals too, "because it's going to be less expensive than, say, making two completely separate meals," she said. Leaning on leftovers is a great way to avoid ordering takeout in a pinch.

She recommended buying in bulk when possible, although one expert tempered that advice by pointing out that some research shows people tend to use products faster if they have more of it on hand.

"Sometimes it makes sense to buy smaller quantities. You'll have less waste," said Deborah Cohn, a professor of marketing at New York Institute of Technology, which has a campus in Old Westbury.

She recommended shoppers plan meals in advance and buy "just what they need."

"Make a spreadsheet on Sunday and decide everything you're going to eat during the week," she said. Avoid "cabinet castaways" by taking inventory of what's in the fridge and pantry before taking a trip to the grocery store, and don't shop while hungry.

Once there, stick to a list and put your phone on silent, she said. "Get in and get out."

The less time in the store, the less money spent, Cohn said.

Shoppers share tips and tricks

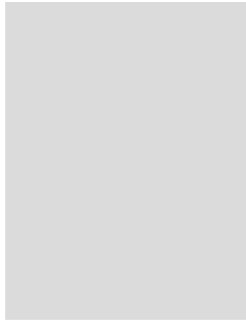
For anyone struggling to make a budget and stick to it, nutritionists and dietitians are usually covered by insurance and can help guide people toward healthier, more budget-friendly meals, Kaidanian said.

But experts aren't the only ones with recommendations for how to save money at the grocery store.

Newsday recently spoke with six shoppers at Long Island grocery stores who shared how they've been navigating the higher prices, from coupon cutting to buying only essentials.

Here's what they had to say:

How Long Islanders shop for groceries



Just some basics

Donald Weimer, 72, of Babylon, said as someone who is retired and single, he doesn't buy many groceries and hasn't felt pressure from rising food prices. He shops at Stew Leonard's because the store stocks milk in paper cartons.



brianne.ledda@newsday.com [X@brianne_ledda](#)

Brianne Ledda covers personal finance and affordability for Newsday. She previously covered Southold and Greenport for The Suffolk Times and is a graduate of Stony Brook University.

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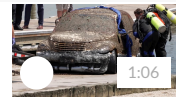
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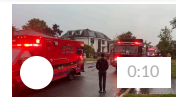
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