

# A Rolling Perspective: Running on empty

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03/07/2019



It amazes me how many people wouldn't dream of putting the wrong type of gas into their car, but when it comes to living within their means, their "life fuel" budget—food—gets targeted first. They'll put premium gas into their car or truck and the absolutely lowest-grade food into their vehicle of flesh. When you're on food stamps (or worse: the dreaded commodity foods that signal you've hit rock bottom), the problems intensify. It's rare indeed if depression doesn't set in. You never have to ask, "What's for dinner?" because you know all too well what's in that commodity food box. You ran out of food stamps two weeks ago. You've been running on empty for quite some time.

I'm not certain when it happened, but most people act as if the homeless, disabled, poverty-stricken, and elderly deserve only the cheapest, least fresh, and vitamin-robbed foods. I contend we need the *best* food, not the worst. We need the strength to live in insufficiently (or over-) heated, mold-filled, faultily-wired, noisy apartments—if we're lucky enough to have housing at all. We need the strength to wheel our wheelchairs, use our walkers, canes, or crutches. Have you ever had to use crutches? They're exhausting. If we had healthful, nourishing food—food that signals we're valued—it follows there would be *fewer* visits to the doctor. Recovery time from surgeries or illnesses would be shorter, too. (Seriously, who gets better on hospital food?)

Far from doom and gloom, though, I'm here to tell you there's light at the end of that food tunnel. Even if all you get are commodity foods, I know how to make them into

tastier fuel. I can help you get the most value from your food budget, whatever it is. I know who can help you maximize the amount of food stamps you get. I know that food shopping journeys can take longer than to fly to another state. (I'm so not kidding, especially if you live in a rural area like I do.) By learning to plan and shop more efficiently, your exhausting trips will at least be fewer in number and more productive. I even have ideas on how to make your kitchen more adaptable to your needs. Over the next few months, I want to help you joyfully complete the vital task of fueling your body.

The increase in self-esteem from making your own nutritious meals will have you looking forward to mealtime *and* give your body better, more efficient fuel. The money you save from making your own food will astound you, especially if you presently live on fast food. Honestly, I eat better and more nutritiously than people spending hundreds of dollars a month. I'm so glad I'm on disability. Learning to eat well on the \$2.39 per day I received from food stamps turned out to be so life-changing, I'm writing a book on it. And I'm sharing tips from it with you.

As I share the who-what-when-where-why-and-hows of eating well on food stamps or a small fixed income, you will hear me mention "libraries" frequently. Utah has one of the best library systems I've ever encountered, and everything you could possibly want to learn about what's in your area—from community gardens, to recipes for every ailment, to beekeeping, to preserving food, to where the free stuff is—you can find there. If you're housebound, they deliver! If you have internet, you can chat online with a librarian. Libraries are, hands down, the best place to go for accurate, up-to-date, and helpful information no matter where you live.

## Now, I need you to complete a few tasks before you start your new food adventure:

- **Check with your doctor** about what foods you cannot have because of medications you're on. Be completely honest with them; they can only give you feedback from what you tell them. The doctor may not know, but you can ask a pharmacist. If nothing else, have a librarian help you find reliable medical evidence about interactions with the medicines you're on. Sadly, the drug information leaflets included with your prescriptions use the scientific names of things and not what we regular humans call it.

- **Keep all your food receipts**, especially the ones from convenience stores, fast food places, or the gas station. You don't need to do anything but throw them in a jar or shoe box. If you don't get a receipt, write it in a little notebook. Don't cheat! I'm not going to judge you, I promise. You're the only one who has to know.
- **Write the date on any bottle you open.** You'll soon have an idea of how quickly or slowly you use those items, and you'll need this info later.
- Finally, **find out if you're entitled to food stamps, or more food stamps.** Did you know that if you're elderly or you have a disability and you qualify for food stamps, you may be eligible for more support **if you have had medical expenses?** Everything helps, right? I found this out when a representative from Jewish Family Services (and no, you don't have to be Jewish or even a family) visited our apartment complex.

- **Commodity Supplemental Food Program: The CSFP website** offers information on the program and how to apply.



Jennifer Holland taught herself to read and write at age four and has been doing both ever since. Minnesota-born and Wisconsin-bred, she nonetheless inherited the Irish penchant for travel. Despite the shoe-string budget, she visited a dozen countries before her self-education, and even lived in Ireland for nearly fifteen years. Her encounters with other cultures inform the quirky insights into human behavior that find their expression in her poetry, novels, and non-fiction works. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys chair yoga, video chats with her children and grandchildren, and living happily with MS on a tiny fixed income.

Are you with me? Do you want to learn the secrets of eating like a king or queen, no matter how small your food budget is? Do you want to feel better about yourself because you've learned to eat well even though you're disabled, elderly, or on a ridiculously tight budget?

I want you to hold your head up high when others in the checkout line are giving you "the look" (you know which one I mean) because you'll know you're using your food stamps to create healthful meals that will restore your vitality, increase your self-esteem, and ensure you never have to run on empty again.

**One last word to food bank donors:** Be honest. We've all done it: cleared out the cupboards and given the food bank the stuff no one will eat. Well, if you don't like it, we probably don't either. Donate the kind of food you'd want if you were in our place. I never thought I'd use a food bank, but now everyone is just a climate disaster or a major medical event away from having to depend on it.

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## Resources of the month:

- **Jewish Family Service:** JFS in Salt Lake City has too many services to list here, so please [visit their website](#) or call 801.746.4334. They are also in Park City: 435.640.6697.
- **List of Food Banks in Utah:** Refer to the list on the right for food bank locations, all over the state.