

SUPERMARKET STRIKE

What if we couldn't get to the shops for a month?
What if our income dried up and all we could
feed our families on was what's in the cupboards?
It's a challenge many benefit claimants are
beset with every week so we asked...



COULD YOU SURVIVE A MONTH WITHOUT
SPENDING A PENNY ON FOOD?



YOU HAVE SIX MONTHS TO PREPARE AND
NO EXTRA BUDGET, WHAT WOULD YOU PUT INTO
YOUR EMERGENCY FOOD CUPBOARD TO LIVE ON?

FOODBANKS

For some, this is more than a paper exercise. Foodbanks are reporting that the number of people turning to them has increased by 17 per cent in the past year. And in areas like Dundee, where the new benefit system Universal Credit is rolling out, handouts have doubled.

Dundee West MP Chris Law told thecourier.co.uk: "I have spoken with Dundee Foodbank, who confirmed to me that Universal Credit and other benefits changes are having an adverse effect on claimants.

"The five-week wait for first payment

of Universal Credit means many have to enter arrears to feed and house themselves."

Almost everyone on any of the following benefits will move onto UC between now and the end of 2022: Housing Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child or Working Tax Credits.

"What we're seeing," reports *Quids in!* editor Jeff Mitchell, "is that most people don't realise how UC will work until they're on it. If they haven't given it any thought before then, it's often too late. People

There was a time when our grandparents had a pantry full of food so old the price tags were still in pounds, shillings and pence. Not so much now but maybe there is something to be said for a little thrift and a lot of forward planning.

If you had six months to spare but no extra budget, what would you put into *your* emergency 'Doomsday Cupboard'?

without savings or any other way to put food on the table in the first month or so are being directed to foodbanks. There is more people can do to prepare for the change to monthly payments in arrears. A 'Doomsday Cupboard' is a great, very practical idea."

For people who will be moving onto Universal Credit, the idea of building up a stock of foods will be one less thing to worry about while benefit payments are paused. But for non-claimants, the benefits of avoiding grocery shopping for a month could also be huge.



ZOMBIE ATTACK?

Maybe not, but there are other reasons to stock up



Okay, so a zombie attack is highly unlikely but there are lots of reasons to stockpile a month's food and build a 'Doomsday Cupboard'. We might be expecting a lean month with less cash coming in, so it would pay to plan ahead. It might be useful to skip a month's shopping and pocket the savings for something else like a holiday. Or with Christmas in the distance, thinking ahead could mean a month's shopping costs can be diverted towards some debt-free holidays.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the average household spends £246 a month on food and non-alcoholic drinks.

So even if we're not among those who will move onto Universal Credit, maybe it's worth thinking about what we could do with a windfall like that. We'd barely even notice if we stick to a plan of spending just a few pounds a week, working up a stockpile of dried, packet and tinned goods, and some of the hardier fresh fruit and veg, until we have a foodbank of our own.

CHALLENGING THE EXPERTS

Foodini Club, the food kit people, are experts in pre-planning meals so we asked how they'd build their own Doomsday Cupboard to avoid the supermarket for a month.

"When thinking about stockpiling a month's worth of rations we also want to plan a healthy, balanced diet at the same time," says Laura Seymour from Foodini. "This means buying a careful mix of dried long-life grains, tinned goods and some fresh produce that stores well (if kept in the right conditions).

"Eating a majority of vegetarian foods will help to make it cost effective, though you will need to supplement with plenty of protein from pulses or beans. You should ensure you get enough fibre too, so you can't skip buying some fresh produce!.

STOCKPILING BASICS

"You want to break down your purchasing," says Laura. "Month-by-month, over six months, start purchasing food items with the longest shelf life and working backwards from there." Here are Foodini Club's top tips for getting started:

- 1 Stay healthy: Include dried long-life grains, tinned goods and fresh produce
- 2 Store everything carefully and buy the longest lasting goods first
- 3 Try different shops that sell by the sack (eg, potatoes, onions) or multi-pack like Asian and wholesale stores
- 4 Shop around online
- 5 Invest £4-5 a week (£20 a month) for six months, cutting back on other things

See the full six-month plan on page 3.

SUPERMARKET SASS

We also turned to money savvy members of SkintDad's Facebook group *Reduce Your Supermarket Spend*. How would they handle a month without shopping?

Jacqui K: Evaporated milk, dried milk, flour, rice, pasta, cheap tinned toms, soya mince, seeds to grow your own spinach (so easy to grow), sauces and gravy (makes spinach more edible!), oil, tinned meat. Buy a few extra items each week.



Sam P: Pasta, rice, cereals, dried milk, sugar, tinned food, coffee, etc. Bread, cheese, meat in the freezer. Potatoes in garage. Also, plenty of toiletries and cleaning products. It would be doable

Sarah Ann G: Would make sure the freezer was completely full before the deadline! I have herbs and potatoes growing in the garden, so could make use of them, also have some seeds for other bits that I'd want to plant out to use.



Lesley N: I could probably feed us and next door as well without getting a single extra thing. It's not called the Armageddon cupboard for nothing!

Vicky M: I could survive for the next 3 months on the food stock I have already in. All I need to do is kick out the 3 kids or move into my shed 😊

SIX-MONTH PLAN

6 months prior to shop-free

Think tinned goods

Our suggestions of what tinned goods and cheap eats could be useful and keep the longest include: tinned tomatoes (an absolute essential), chickpeas, other pulses and beans such as cannellini, kidney and black beans, sweetcorn and peas.

5 months prior

Oils and spices

Focus on oils like vegetable oil and, if you can, some olive oil. Also vinegar – a small dash of vinegar adds a kick to most sauces and can help you make your own salad dressing. Then mustard (for the same reasons as vinegar), salt, pepper, spices and herbs that add useful extra flavour to repetitive meals. Pick your choice of mixed herbs or (dried) oregano, thyme, rosemary, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, paprika and turmeric. Finally, some vegetable and/or chicken stock cubes.

4 months prior

Dried goods

Dried, longer-life goods like pasta shapes and any dried beans or chickpeas (that you have to soak and cook but are much cheaper to buy than tinned beans), sacks of rice, cous cous, lentils like red split lentils or green lentils, tea and/or coffee. You have to be sure you can keep these dry. It's no good buying a sack of rice, which is way cheaper per meal when you buy in bulk, if you can only store it in a damp garage or shed – it will get ruined.

3 months prior

Flours and shorter-life dried goods

Flours and shorter life dried goods such as plain flour, wholemeal flour, gram or chickpea flour might be cheaper at Asian food shops and supermarkets than regular supermarkets. Pick up baking powder, dried egg, sugars (molasses sugar is a cheap and tasty, healthier sugar than pure white and can be used in smaller amounts, giving a richer flavour) and milk powder. Cornmeal can be used later for corn tortillas and cornbread – a filling meal in itself. Finally, the very essential porridge oats. The cheaper the better! Oats can be used in many ways... creating a tasty flapjack snack, breakfast

porridge or for stodging up meat or meatless balls or burgers.

2 months prior

Frozen (if you have a freezer)

Now let's get started on ingredients like frozen peas, frozen spinach chunks (very useful to throw into sauces and curries) and other veg where it's cheaper than fresh. Frozen meat such as mince and chicken breast portions are a lot cheaper in the frozen aisle but also consider meat alternative like quorn mince. Frozen fish pieces, fruit and berries are worth stocking up with now too. Think thrift and if there's cheap fruit and veg that can be prepared and frozen, do that... drying out mushrooms or letting bananas ripen and chopping them into chunks before freezing both work. Here's a thing: You can freeze cheese and the easiest way we've found is to grate it into an airtight box first – and the stronger the cheese, the less you need to make something tasty.

1 month prior

Longer life fresh produce

With just a few weeks before your shop-free month, fresh veg like squashes and pumpkins, onions, potatoes both white and sweet (keep white potatoes in a dark place), and carrots (which should last you a couple of weeks). Buy these things as close to the month ending as possible and buy in bulk if you have the ready cash and space to store them safely, so onions and potatoes by sack. (Try Asian and other stores to see if they're cheaper). Other fresh vegetables can be blanched in boiling water in chunks and frozen, ready to use through the month. Eggs with the latest 'best before' dates could be good too.

During the shop-free month

If you have room, it could pay (and save time later) to cook in bulk and freeze meal portions, which will also mean certain fresh veg can be kept longer. Remember there is a difference between 'best before' and 'use by' dates. Don't throw anything out unless you're really not sure it's safe to eat but don't take risks with fresh meat, fish or dairy, which will normally look or smell wrong. Eggs, for example, often last for ages and can be tested by placing them in a jug of water – the more they float, the more ready for the bin they are.

'DOOMSDAY' RECIPES

Once we have our Doomsday Cupboard set up, we need to know what to do with all the ingredients we've collected. There are hundreds of budget recipe ideas online but here are a couple to get your mouth watering.

Costing a few quid a day, it shows how spending about the same amount per week on ingredients for six months turns into just about a month's worth of main meals.

MAC 'N' CHEESE

RECIPE COST:
£2.85
SERVES 4 PEOPLE

INGREDIENTS

- 300g macaroni
- 25g margarine or butter
- 25g plain flour
- 500ml milk
- 250g grated cheddar cheese, plus 50g for topping
- 100g meat, meatless or veg leftovers
- 4 chopped tomatoes
- Salt, pepper, mustard (optional)

METHOD

- 1 Follow cooking instructions on the packet for the macaroni (about 12 minutes)
- 2 Melt the butter into a large pan mixing in the flour as you go until it becomes a paste, adding a little salt, pepper and mustard as desired
- 3 After a minute or so, mix in the milk bit by bit until all of it is mixed smoothly together and starts to thicken. You may need to raise the heat. This should take roughly 10 minutes
- 4 Once thick, take it off the heat and stir in the 250g of grated cheese, followed by the tomatoes, the 'leftovers' and then the cooked macaroni
- 5 Transfer it all to an oven proof dish and spread the remaining cheese across the top
- 6 Grill for up to 10 minutes or until golden brown

FOODINI CLUB'S SOCCA SPECIALS

RECIPE COST:
£1.02
PER SOCCA (FOR ONE)

[A 'socca' is like a very simple pizza, made like a pancake – dead easy to make and topped with whatever you like]

INGREDIENTS FOR SOCCA BASE

- 130g gram flour
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tbsp olive or vegetable oil
- 300ml warm water

TOPPING SUGGESTIONS

- Onion, tomato sauce, cheese, meat, meatless or veg leftovers... or whatever you really fancy!

METHOD

- 1 Put all the base ingredients into a large bowl and whisk well until mixture is smooth and lump free. Leave for 30 mins – this step is important so don't skip!
- 2 Prepare your toppings, slicing and frying an onion or mushrooms, grating cheese... whatever you've chosen
- 3 Heat a large heavy bottom frying pan with 1 tbsp oil (or slide a deeper baking dish under the grill with the oil in) to get hot, then pour in the batter and cook for 3-4mins until it starts to set
- 4 Sprinkle in your chosen toppings and cook for 12 minutes on the heat
- 5 Pop under the grill and heat for 12-15 minutes until golden and crunchy around the edge.
- 6 Slide out of the pan, cut into wedges and serve warm!



MEATBALLS (AND BURGERS)

INGREDIENTS FOR MEATBALLS (AND BURGERS)

- 500g beef mince
- 100g breadcrumbs or oats
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp mixed herbs/ spices
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tbsp (preferably olive) oil

INGREDIENTS FOR TOMATO SAUCE

- 1 onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tin of tomatoes
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 vegetable stock cube
- 300ml hot water
- 1 tsp paprika

RECIPE COST:
£3.63
SERVES 4 PEOPLE

SERVE WITH

- 400g pasta, eg, spaghetti or tagliatelle
- Grated cheese for topping

METHOD (MEATBALLS)

- 1 Mix all the ingredients (except the oil) in a large bowl until one consistent mixture
- 2 Split into 12 small balls
- 3 Heat the oil in a pan and, when hot, add the balls
- 4 Brown the balls' edges, then start on the tomato sauce...
- 5 In the same pan, add the onions (diced) and garlic (crushed or sliced)
- 6 As the onions soften, add the rest of the sauce ingredients, chopping the tomatoes if not chopped already
- 7 Mix and cook on a medium heat for 20 minutes,
- 8 Cook the pasta following the packet instruction
- 9 Serve the balls in sauce on the pasta and add the cheese topping

METHOD (BURGERS)

- 1 As steps 1 to 4 above, instead splitting the meatball mixture into four and flattening into burgers
- 2 Sizzle for about 10-12 minutes, turning every now and again
- 3 Rest for a few minutes and serve with cheese in a bun or as desired