

LifeStyle Skills

► Shopping The Low-Cal Way

For New Direction and OutLook Weight Control Programs

When you complete this module, you will be able to . . .

- Develop strategies for food shopping that can help you stay on your weight-loss program
- Make healthful, low-calorie choices as you walk up and down the supermarket aisles

With tens of thousands of products on most supermarket shelves, shopping for foods that will help you stay on your weight-loss program can be a challenging experience. Add the temptations of free samples, mouth-watering food displays, supermarket specials, and checkout line sweets, and you could end up buying more or differently than you had planned. The tips and strategies that follow will help you bypass temptation and get the best nutritional buys within your calorie budget.

Supermarket Strategies

To make wise food shopping decisions, you need to have a game plan before stepping into the supermarket. Here are some suggestions to help you create your food shopping game plan.

Plan ahead. Have a week's menu in mind. Ask yourself, "How many meals will I need to prepare?" "What would I like to eat?" "What do I need to buy?" By planning and shopping for the week, you'll avoid extra trips to the store, which means less exposure to temptation.

Keep a running shopping list of foods you need to replace. Put it somewhere convenient--on your refrigerator, for instance.

Take the shopping list to the supermarket. A list saves time and helps you remember what you need. Stick to the list and you'll be less likely to spend money on items you really don't need.

Arrange the list according to the location of foods in the supermarket. In most stores, you'll find produce in the first aisle, with meat, poultry, fish, and dairy foods along the perimeter. Organizing your list by store layout will help you avoid haphazard weaving through the aisles and can cut down on impulse buying.

Check the list before you start shopping. If you only need a few items, use a basket instead of a shopping cart. It'll help prevent you from buying more than you need, and you'll get in some arm strengthening exercises, as well.

Shop after you eat, not when you're hungry. That way you'll be less tempted to buy higher-calorie, less nutritious snacks and sweets.

Read food labels. Check the Nutrition Facts panel for serving size, calories, fat, fiber, and other nutrition information relevant to your needs. Use food labels to comparison shop and to help you get the most nutritional value for your money.

Clip coupons only for items you need. As good a bargain as the coupon may seem, if the food doesn't fit into your meal plan or help you stay on your weight loss program, then it's not worth buying. Also, realize that items with coupons may not always be the best buy. Check out other brands to find the best price for the quality you want.

Shopping the Supermarket Aisles

Supermarket shelves are filled with foods that can fit your weight-loss program and are good for your health, as well. Here are some tips to help you navigate the supermarket aisles and make shopping the low-cal way a delicious experience.

Produce Aisle

In most supermarkets, the produce department is the first stop on your shopping trip. If you're going to linger anywhere in the supermarket, the produce aisle, with its bright colors and vast array of nutritious fruits and vegetables, is the place to be. Fill your cart with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Buy seasonal produce to maximize freshness and minimize cost. Be adventurous. Try something new, like starfruit or jicama. You may even find preparation tips for unfamiliar fruits and vegetables in the produce department. Or try a different variety of a familiar food, like Granny Smith or Cortland apples.

Meat, Poultry, Fish and Deli Counters

Look for lean cuts of meat. The loin, round or leg cuts are your best bets. Meats graded "select" have the least amount of marbling, or fat between the muscles, followed by "choice" grades of meat. Shop for lean ground meat and buy well-trimmed meat. Choose skinless poultry. Or, to cut costs, buy it with the skin on and take the skin off before eating. Select light-meat instead of dark-meat chicken or turkey to cut down on fat.

Add fish to your shopping cart for a low-fat meal 2-3 times a week. Even higher-fat fish are good choices because of their health benefits. Varieties such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel contain omega-3s, a type of fatty acid that reduces blood clotting and may help prevent heart disease.

At the deli counter or packaged meat aisle, choose reduced-fat luncheon meats, and chicken or turkey breast, and stay away from the more processed full-fat choices, like bologna or sausage. Read food labels to check calorie, fat, and sodium content before deciding on which product to buy.

Freezer Case

The frozen food aisle is stocked with all kinds of convenience items, some more nutritious than others. Check the food labels on frozen prepared meals and entrees for calories, fat, cholesterol and sodium information, and serving size, to help you find the best nutritional buys. To control fat and calories, choose frozen vegetables without sauce, stay away from fried or breaded products, and if you want dessert, choose low-fat or fat-free frozen desserts.

Grocery Aisles

To cut down on calories, choose canned fish in water instead of oil, canned fruit packed in juice or water instead of syrup, diet soft drinks instead of regular soda, and crackers or snack foods that are labeled reduced fat or light. Buy lower-fat or fat-free versions of salad dressings and mayonnaise, and choose herbs and spices to give flavor to foods without adding extra fat.

Dairy Case

Slash fat and calories by opting for skim or 1% low-fat milk; low-fat or nonfat yogurt; and lower-fat cheeses like low-fat ricotta, part-skim mozzarella or reduced-fat cheese. Choose diet margarine instead of regular stick margarine. If cholesterol is a concern, try egg substitutes instead of whole eggs.

Bread Aisle and Bakery Section

For a fiber boost, look for breads labeled "whole grain" and "whole wheat." Reduced-calorie breads have more fiber than white bread, plus you get 2 slices for about the same calories as one regular slice. Choose breads and baked goods with less fat, like bagels, pita, and French and Italian breads, rather than items with more fat, like croissants, muffins, and doughnuts.