



10 Tips for Thrifty Grocery Shopping for Nutritious Foods

1. Plan Ahead

Review your calendar to determine how many meals will be eaten during the week and any special occasions needing additional food. Review local grocery ads for specials. Consider what is already in your pantry, freezer, and refrigerator, and plan healthy nutritious meals. A healthy eating routine is important at every stage of life and can have positive effects that add up over time. It is important to eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein foods, and dairy (or lactose-free or fortified soy alternatives). When deciding what to eat or drink, choose options that are full of nutrients. Make every bite count by following the MyPlate guidelines: <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>.

2. Know How Much You Have to Spend

Establish a spending plan or have an idea how much money you can afford to spend on grocery shopping. There are several factors that can cause an increase or decrease from week to week – holidays, celebrations, weather, etc.

3. Create a Grocery List

It is important to have a shopping list. Maintaining a grocery list all week will hopefully reduce the number of items you forget to purchase. Make a list by looking in your kitchen cabinets, pantry, and refrigerator to see what food items you need at home. For advanced list-makers, save time by organizing your shopping list into sections according to the layout of the grocery store. When you get to the store, remember to stick to your list to avoid buying unnecessary items.

4. Be a Seasonal Shopper

Purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in season for better flavor and lower cost. Purchase Arkansas Grown when possible. Avoid buying precut fruits and vegetables – choose whole fruits and vegetables instead, which are typically less expensive.



5. Discounts, Sales, Coupons, and Bulk Purchases

Save money with discount and sale purchases. Utilize coupons clipped from mailers and newspapers, those available online, and those that have been sent to you or pop up on your store's loyalty card. Buy store brands. Most stores offer their own brand of products that often cost less than name brands. Find and compare unit prices listed on shelves to get the best price. You can also buy some items in bulk sizes or as family packs that usually cost less. Buying in bulk or larger quantities usually saves money.

Key questions to ask yourself:

- Is it really on sale or just a marketing pitch?
- If it is on sale, do I really need it?
- How many is a reasonable purchase?
- If I buy a lot of it, do I have a place to store it?
- Will it spoil before I have a chance to use it?



6. Do Not Waste Money on Food You Do Not Eat

Buying food because it was on sale and then throwing it away because it was not eaten did not save money. Buy in the quantity you can consume before it spoils. Many items stored in the refrigerator can be frozen for later use if they cannot be eaten fresh. Yes, smaller sizes may cost a few pennies more, but may reduce waste. Share with a neighbor or a friend.

7. Convenience Costs (or does it?)

The most nutritious foods are around the border of the grocery store (fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products, meats, and breads). The inner aisles have more of the processed food which might be quicker to prepare but include many more additives. Shop for items on the upper and lower shelves as most stores stock the most expensive items at the consumer's eye level.

Key questions to ask yourself:

- Is bigger always better?
- Is less expensive always best?
- Store brand vs. national brand?
- Cost per serving?
- Whole foods or processed?
- Nutrition information?

8. Understand Date-Labeling Phrases – Do Not Waste Money Via Food Waste

Check the date-labeling phrases on food products. There are a wide variety of phrases used on labels to describe quality dates. Examples of commonly used phrases:

- **“Best if Used By/Before”** date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **“Sell-By”** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.
- **“Use-By”** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formula.
- **“Freeze-By”** date indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.



Grocery stores typically stock their shelves with the newest items behind the older ones. Choose items from the back of the shelf so that you are getting the freshest items, especially in the produce, dairy and meat aisles.

9. Time to Shop

An important to remember when grocery shopping: never shop on an empty stomach. Always eat before going to the grocery store. Shopping while hungry could lead you to buy less nutritious impulse items and cause you to spend more money than you had intended. Evenings and weekends tend to be busier times for grocery shopping so plan for the extra time needed.

10. New Ways to Cook (Get Creative in the Kitchen)

Look for recipes that add new life to favorite foods for variety. There are a number of new appliances that allow you to prepare favorite foods in more healthy ways.

Information adapted from:

Purdue University, Extension: <https://ieha-families.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/10-Secrets-to-Thrifty-Grocery-Shopping.pdf>
Ohio State University, Extension: <https://u.osu.edu/chow-line/2017/04/17/save-time-and-money-at-the-grocery-store/>
USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>