



## Adding Up the Savings! When Shopping for Food

Planning is the key to a healthy, low cost, diet. It takes time, money, energy, knowledge and skills, but it pays off in lower food bills.

Spending less on food often means taking the time and effort to plan menus, review grocery ads for specials and cook more at home.

### Before You Go To the Store

#### Check What's At Home

Your major reason for going to a supermarket is to buy food, so check your refrigerator and pantry before going. You may be able to combine a food on hand with an ingredient to be bought to make another meal without spending much money. When checking supplies on hand, list staple items that you are out of.

Also, look at your food storage space. Include cold storage (refrigerator and freezer) and dry storage (cupboards and shelves). How much room do you have?

Now that you know what you have, it's time to plan your menu and write a shopping list. A little extra time at home saves time and money at the store.

#### Check Grocery Ads

Most newspapers carry ads each week for major food stores in their areas.

Some stores also advertise on television and radio. Use these ads to compare products and prices from different stores.

In an effort to attract customers, food stores often feature "specials" (items at reduced prices). These may be bargains that will save you money if they are items that you use. Remember, however, not all advertised items are specials. Also, compare the price of comparable products.

For produce consider freshness and quality. For meats consider grade, closeness of trim for fat, and bone.

#### Clip Coupons

Manufacturers and food retailers often use coupons to promote the sale of certain products. Clip and save coupons for products you will be buying. Coupons are sometimes used to promote the sale of new products. However, most are for highly advertised brands. Coupons can save you money on items that you use. However, using a coupon does not guarantee the item will sell for less than another brand or a store brand, so don't forget to compare the costs.

Some resources that may be helpful include:

[www.thegrocerygame.com](http://www.thegrocerygame.com), [www.afullcup.com](http://www.afullcup.com),  
[www.couponloop.com](http://www.couponloop.com),  
[www.coolsavings.com](http://www.coolsavings.com), [www.shortcuts.com](http://www.shortcuts.com),  
[www.pgesaver.com](http://www.pgesaver.com), [www.upromise.org](http://www.upromise.org), and  
[www.cellfire.com](http://www.cellfire.com).

#### Plan Your Meals

Make a meal plan for the week, even if it is just for dinner. Remember to plan nutritionally balanced meals. A plan will save you preparation time, money and can ensure better meals.

To plan your meals:

- Check refrigerator, freezer and cupboard for items that need to be used before they spoil.
- Fill in menu using these items
- Review grocery ads for specials that you can use this week in your menu plan. Add to menu plan and grocery list.

- Think about family favorites and staples needed. Check for ingredients needed for recipes in menu plan. Add to menu plan and grocery list.

### **Make A Shopping List**

Organize your shopping list by food type and department. For example, list all meats together. Do the same with the other types of products such as canned foods, dairy products and cleaning supplies. This helps you avoid forgetting things and having to make another trip to the store.

When making the list, keep in mind the store layout if you know it. For example, if the produce is located on the right at the front of the store, list your fruits and vegetables first. Don't make the list too rigid. Example, you may list "green vegetable, broccoli." When you are in the store, look at the green vegetables. Compare what is available, quality, and cost. Buy broccoli if it is the best buy. But, if another green vegetable is a better buy, purchase it.

Stick to your list. Add to it only if you see special bargains that will save money. Make substitutions when better buys are found.

### **At the Store**

#### **Compare the Cost Per Serving of Various Foods**

It is important to compare the cost per serving. For example the amount of fat and bone varies from one cut of meat to another. Ground beef provides 4 servings per pound while spare ribs give 1 ½ servings per pound. To figure the cost per serving, divide the number of servings into the cost of the item.

#### **Compare the Unit Price of Various Forms, Brands, and Sizes**

When shopping, be sure to compare unit price between like items. You may think that buying one large container will cost less than 2 smaller packages, but larger containers are not always less expensive. Use unit pricing to find the best buy.

Unit pricing helps you:

- Find the lowest cost package size.  
Biggest is not always the better buy.

- Find the brand that costs less. Generic or store brands are often (but not always) lower in price.
- Compare prices for different product forms; such as, fresh, frozen and canned items, as well as the cost of individual pieces of prepackaged food like bagels, muffins or rolls.

Most stores show unit prices. Look for them on the shelf in front of the product, above the product, or to the side of the product.

If unit pricing is not available, take a calculator to the store or use the calculator on your cell phone to do the simple math:

$$\text{Unit price} = \frac{\text{package price}}{\text{number of units}}$$

#### **Use Open Dating Information**

Many products are stamped with a date. Most open dates are shelf removal or quality assurance dates. If a product will be stored for some time before being used, buy it as fresh as possible. If the food is to be used immediately, the date isn't as important.

#### **Avoid Impulse Buys**

Unplanned purchases can wreck your budget. Don't be unduly influenced by big displays, or fancy ads. These are designed to promote sales. Just because an item is sold in a bin or on a promotional table does not guarantee it is reduced in price. Compare it with similar "regular priced" products to see if it is a bargain.

#### **Checking Out**

Watch to be sure breakable and crushable items are correctly bagged. Also, food items that are easily bruised must be carefully packed. Bananas crushed by a can or peas aren't very appealing.

Make sure you pay special attention when you are paying for your groceries. Mistakes happen and it is easier to catch them if you are paying attention. Check your receipt before you leave the store.

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### **References:**

Add Up the Savings When Shopping for Food. <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/moneywise>. August 2008.

Plan for Food Spending. NEP-210FG. Kathy Daly-Koziel, former EFNEP Coordinator. Revised by Rita May, Extension Associate for Nutrition Education Programs. October 2007. May 2007.

Plan for Food Spending. NEP-210. Kathy Daly-Koziel, former EFNEP Coordinator. Revised by Rita May, Extension Associate for Nutrition Education Programs. October 2007. October 2007.