

Smart grocery store navigation: A guide to healthy food shopping



Commentary by 1LT Melissa Shaffer, EACD Dietician

The moment you enter a grocery store, you have been targeted. Food items have been carefully placed throughout the grocery store to increase the amount of time you spend shopping and entice you to buy more. In fact, according to The Time Use Institute, shoppers spend an average of 41 minutes shopping in a single trip and about \$2.17 every minute they shop. Knowing how to quickly navigate through the store and focusing on healthy food items can help you save time and money. Become a smart shopper that stays focused and avoids impulse buys by increasing your awareness of marketing ploys and preparing for your trip in advance.

Before you set off to the store, see what food items you already have at home and make a shopping list based on your meal plan for the week. Sticking to this list while shopping will help you resist the urge to purchase items you do not need. Avoid temptation by only going down aisles that contain items on your list. Many of the foods and drinks found on the soda and snack aisles are high in calories, sugars and fats and going down one of these aisles can increase the chances of you buying these items. Also, never shop for food when you are hungry. Shopping on an empty stomach can increase the number of items you purchase by making the food look more appealing.

Becoming familiar with the layout of the store can also save time and money. Most grocery stores are laid out so that common food items are located on the outskirts of the store. Have you ever noticed that the produce and milk sections are often located on the opposite sides of the store? This is not a coincidence. The store is designed so that you spend more time and money shopping by having you travel across the entire store to get the items you need. Try spending more time shopping the perimeter of the store and less time in the middle aisles that contain mostly processed foods. When shopping in the center aisles of the store be aware of the placement of products. Shelf space is often used to increase sales by placing more expensive items at eye-level and less expensive items on the bottom shelves.

If shopping with children, be aware that food companies spend a lot of money marketing products to kids. The foods most often marketed to children are high in calories and sugar, such as cereals, fruit snacks, frozen desserts and candy. These items are often placed at eye-level for children and are in

packages that are colorful and appeal to kids. Try shifting kids' attention from unhealthy items by discussing healthier choices and allowing them to assist with finding items on your shopping list.

Begin your shopping trip in the produce section. Look for fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season. These items are usually cheaper and located in displays at the front of the produce section. Buying pre-cut and packaged fruit and vegetables can be convenient but often more expensive; save money by cutting and washing your own produce. If fresh items are too expensive, try buying them frozen or canned. ChooseMyPlate.gov recommends that half of our plate be made up of fruits and vegetables so select a variety of these nutrient rich foods.

Once you navigate to the bread and cereal aisles, make sure to look for items that contain whole grains. It is important to make sure that at least half of the grains that you eat are whole grains. Whole grains are important because they contain nutrients and fiber that are vital for health and decrease the risk of chronic diseases. When shopping, look for products that list whole grains as the first or second item on the ingredients label. Examples of whole grains include oatmeal, brown rice, whole-wheat flour, popcorn and whole cornmeal.

Select lean cuts of meat and try to buy in bulk to save money. Examples of lean cuts of meat include chicken breast, with skin removed, round steaks of beef, and center loin of pork. Do not forget to eat at least two servings (8 ounces) of fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, herring and trout, weekly. Consuming omega-3's may help reduce the risk of heart disease. As you make your way to the dairy section, look for low-fat and fat-free options. Most dairy products contain calcium that is needed to build and maintain strong bones and teeth. If consuming dairy alternatives, such as almond milk or soy milk, be sure to purchase a product that is fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

When selecting food items, be picky and inspect for quality and health claims. Check expiration dates and only buy items in bulk that you use often. As you navigate the store, pay attention to nutrition labels to compare foods and make healthier choices. First, look at the serving size because the nutrient information is presented for one serving and not the entire package. Some companies may use smaller serving sizes to present lower calorie and fat counts on the labels. When looking at the serving size, think about how much of the item you would eat and consider how much that changes the amount of calories and other nutrients listed on the nutrient panel. Pay particular attention to the amount of fat, cholesterol, sodium and sugar in the product and try to limit your intake of these. The percent daily value (%DV) can also be used as a tool to determine the percentage of your estimated daily intake contained in each serving of the product. Keep in mind that the %DV is based

on a 2000 calorie diet, but can still be used as a guide, regardless of your calorie intake. The FDA recommends, as a quick reference, to consider a 5%DV low and a 20%DV or more as high when determining the nutrient content of a food item.

Now the next time that you shop for food you will be better prepared to navigate the store efficiently by planning for your trip in advance and purchasing only the items that you need. Remember to stay focused on selecting a variety of produce, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy. Happy shopping!

If you are interested in looking more into navigating through our commissary, the Evans Army Community Hospital Nutrition Care Division staff hosts a monthly Commissary Tour. Call 526-7290 to sign up!



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