

## GROCERY SHOPPING

### Shopping For the Best Food Values

Shopping for affordable and healthy foods can be a daunting task. We live in an era where the consumer is having a greater influence upon food products. As we demand more healthful grocery items, companies are responding. Options abound and that's better for you, as a consumer, but it also translates into more decisions at a time when your brain may feel fried from life's many demands. This guide will help to ease your confusion as you navigate the aisles of the supermarket. If you arm yourself with guidelines for food selection, you will help to sustain your body and your bank account.

### General Tips

- Start with a grocery list of needs and go shopping after you eat. This will help you to avoid impulse buying, which is the greatest single cause of grocery overspending.
- Try to plan balanced meals ahead of time and add the necessary ingredients to your list. This can easily be done a week at a time. It can also help prevent the "I'm starving, but we don't have anything to make for dinner... I guess we can scrounge up something here or just go out; I don't feel like running to the store right now" syndrome.
- Check the weekly sales ad flyer for the stores where you like to shop. In Denton, stores run new weekly specials beginning each Wednesday. Choose your best day of the week to shop and try to shop only weekly.
- Start your shopping trip in the fresh produce aisles and end with the frozen foods section. Try to "shop the perimeter". This means avoiding the temptations found in the center aisles. The aisles of the store generally hold many of the high-fat, high-sugar and processed items. Think about it... most of your fresh vegetables, meats, dairy, etc. are found around your grocer's perimeter. This, of course, does not mean that you should avoid the healthy choices that are sometimes found along the aisles, such as whole grain pasta, cereal, rice, etc. Each store is different, but this can be helpful to keep in mind.
- Consider buying generic brands when the quality is not compromised. There should be a significant savings. Compare ingredient and nutrient labels between name brand and generic items.
- Think "My Pyramid" in planning meals and snacks.

### Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- Choose fresh fruits and veggies when they are in season, affordable, and will be used within the next 4-7 days. They will be at their peak flavor and best value (supply and demand rule) if purchased "in season". Avoid waste by adding diced leftover peppers, celery, onion, mushrooms and other veggies into main dishes; it adds color, nutrients & flavor.
- Be choosy. Select fresh produce that will yield flavor, nutrition, and minimal waste. Examine each fruit or vegetable visually and by touch.
- Check prices on organically-grown foods; they are not always more expensive.
- You'll keep variety in your diet by shopping the rotating sales on fresh produce weekly. Also, shop by color, looking for a variety of oranges, yellows, reds, purples and deep green shades.
- Be realistic. Don't buy produce you know will quickly convert your refrigerator's crisper into a

“slime-er”, creating dollar waste, guilt over wasted food, and a mess to clean. If you’re trying to change eating habits, purchase only a few pieces of the fruit or vegetables you plan to eat and try replacing them for your typical sweets. Make an effort to eat them within the first few days after purchase.

### **Frozen or Canned Fruits and Vegetables**

- Keep a variety of colorful frozen vegetables and fruits in your freezer. Steam, stir fry or microwave veggies. Add frozen fruit to smoothies, cereal or batters.
- Stock canned legumes, corn, carrots, and tomato products for main dish ingredients. It’s the Vitamin C-rich veggies that are most compromised in the canning process.

### **Bakery, Snack Foods, and Beverages**

- Don’t skip the breads! Purchase “**whole**” **grain breads**. Include choices such as whole wheat, rye, or whole multi-grains. For starters, include variety by also including mini whole grain bagels, English muffins, and whole wheat cinnamon-raisin bread.
- Determine not to spend much money in the chips and sodas section of the store. If you buy the chips, you (or someone else) will devour them, often in lieu of healthier options. Needing chips for a party? Baked chips are a good option. Canned nuts can also make a healthy snack item if you limit your portion.
- Read the nutrient labels and compare total fat, *trans* fats, saturated fats and sodium per portion. When comparing labels of like items, make sure that you are comparing equal portions on products. Remember that crackers, snack bars, chips and other snacks/sweets often have “hidden” *trans* fat, so make sure you read the label and try to choose options that **DO NOT** contain **hydrogenated** oils.
- Opt for waters and 100% juice over carbonated beverages, when possible.

### **Cheeses, Deli Meats and Dairy**

- Lower fat cheese (try the 2% milk version of your favorite cheese), lean deli meats (try low fat turkey breast or chicken) and yogurts make good snack options.
- Opt for shredded or hunk cheeses over the processed, individually wrapped cheeses. They are lower in sodium and can be cheaper.
- Consider topping toasted bagels, toast and muffins with a reduced fat cream cheese spread in place of margarine or butter.
- If you plan to make sandwiches, look for special offers at your store’s deli. Skip the salami, bologna and other “mystery meats” and opt for lean roast beef, chicken, turkey or ham to obtain the most protein and least fat per ounce. Keep in mind that deli meats typically will contain sodium nitrite in small amounts as a curing agent to prevent the growth of *Clostridium Botulinum*. Therefore, limit your deli meats in order to keep your sodium intake in check.
- Don’t forget the milk. Choose from a variety of Vitamin D-fortified products, including cow’s milk, Lactaid or Soy milk products. Opt for the lower fat choices as they pack fewer calories, as well as less cholesterol and saturated fat.

### **Fats and Oils**

- Where possible, use a liquid vegetable oil for your food fat, as it provides more essential fatty acids, fewer saturated fats and little or no *trans* fats. Current research supports using canola and olive oils predominantly for cooking, though other vegetable oils such as soybean, corn, and peanut oil are commonly enjoyed and also good options.
- The more polyunsaturated a fat is, the more susceptible it is to oxidation and rancidity. Store

- opened oils in dark, cool places with a firm sealing of the cap to maximize its shelf life.
- Try using an olive oil or canola oil non-stick spray. Generic brands seem equal in performance to advertised brands.
  - For spreadable and cookie-baking fats, read your nutrient labels. Avoid *trans* fats, made by hydrogenation of liquid oils and limit saturated fats to 2g per serving.

### What Does it Mean?

- "Sell by" dates tell store employees how long they can display an item for purchase. Do not buy a product after this date.
- "Best if used by" date refers to when the product's flavor, taste and quality will be optimum. It can still be safe and fresh after this date. How a product is stored will largely determine its shelf life.
- "Use by" date is direct; toss the food item after that date.

### Saving Money

- Compare prices of differing forms of the same food, such as canned, frozen or fresh orange juice. Do you really want to pay extra for the higher cost of shipping bulkier or heavier products? Is the individual wrapping of items worth the extra cost to you? Make sure you are comparing equal products. 100% juice is worth more than juice drink with 100% vitamin C, for example.
- Buy great deals in quantity if adequate storage is available, such as skinless, boneless chicken breasts at half the normal cost.
- Pay attention to store ads; compare **unit prices** to get the best price. (i.e. what you are paying per ounce or per individual item)
- You will generally pay more for a convenience, pre-prepared item. Consider buying basic (whole) foods to create a meal; it may not take much extra time and you'll enjoy a fresher meal.
- Advertising is a huge budget line item for companies. Buying generic versus popular brand name could save you big bucks if the quality is comparable. Take a moment to compare label ingredients and then do a taste comparison.

### Additional Reading & Resources

- <http://www.eatright.org>
- <http://www.nutrition4texas.org>
- <http://www.supermarketguru.com/page.cfm/31495>
- [http://www.medicinenet.com/food\\_and\\_grocery\\_shopping/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/food_and_grocery_shopping/article.htm)
- <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/NIRC/pdf/5aday.PDF>
- [http://www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat\\_well\\_live\\_well/english/menuplanner/AppendixC.asp](http://www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/menuplanner/AppendixC.asp)

*Bowes & Church's Food Values of Portions Commonly Used, 18th edition* by Jean Pennington and Judith S. Douglass. Published by Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2005.

*Pocket Supermarket Guide, 3rd edition* by Mary Abbott Hess. Published by The American Dietetic Association, 2005.