

## Making your grocery trip a healthy one

By Julia Haskins

**A** trip to the grocery store isn't always so simple. You need to pay close attention to what you're buying, think about how to make nutritious and filling meals and find foods your whole family will enjoy. But if you know how to be a smart shopper, your next grocery store visit can be a healthy and successful one.

Before you head out, plan ahead. Take stock of the food you have at home and what you need to buy for healthy meals and snacks throughout the week. Use a paper shopping list or smartphone app to keep track of all the products you will need. Be sure to include lean proteins, whole grains and plenty of produce, as recommended by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Also remember to have a light, healthy meal before you shop so that you aren't tempted by hunger to buy more than you need.

When you get to the store, load up on fresh produce first. This is one of the healthiest areas of the store and will set you up for good shopping habits during your time at the grocery store. Try to buy a rainbow of items, from orange carrots to green broccoli.

Lisa Sheehan-Smith, EdD, RD, LDN, a professor of nutrition and food science and director of the Didactic Program in Dietetics at Middle Tennessee State University, recommends buying produce that's in season, but notes you can still get nutritious produce that's canned or frozen. Just make sure these products are packaged in their own water or juice and aren't loaded with added salt.

As you shop for packaged foods, make sure that you read the labels carefully. Labels can sometimes be tricky and lead you to buy products that aren't so healthy. Portion sizes can be especially sneaky.

"Look for the portion size, because the calories, fat, sodium and added sugars, etc., are for the stated portion,"

Sheehan-Smith says. "They may sound low, but the shopper may typically eat two to three times the stated portion size."

When in doubt, look for ingredient lists that are short and easy to read. Also note the order

of ingredients on labels. The most common ingredients in a product will be at the beginning of the list, while the least common will be at the end.



"If whole-wheat flour is listed first in the ingredient list for a slice of whole-grain

bread, then there is more whole-wheat flour than other ingredients," Sheehan-Smith says. "If all-purpose flour is listed first but the front of the bread package identifies the bread as wheat bread, then this wouldn't be the best choice to buy if the shopper wanted whole-grain bread."

Many foods you can buy in bulk make great pantry staples and are often inexpensive. Look for whole grains, beans, lentils and black-eyed peas. Stock up on these items to make hearty soups and stews or toss them in a salad.

You can also get creative when shopping for proteins.

You may tend to buy chicken or beef because you're used to these proteins, but there are many more options that are just as healthy and can be used in a range of dishes, such as stir fry, pasta and casseroles. Mix it up with lean turkey, fish or lamb. For a vegetarian option, use tofu as a base for a variety of meals with plenty of vegetables.

The dairy aisle is filled with many products



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that may seem healthy upon first glance, but are actually high in fats and sugars. That's because a lot of dairy products have additives to make them sweeter. When shopping for dairy products, choose plain milk and yogurts.

Pay attention to where items are placed throughout the grocery store. Sugary drinks and snacks are often placed low at children's eye level. Candy that's right by the register is also meant to encourage shoppers to make last-second impulse purchases.

Look out for sneaky ways that your grocery store is designed so that you can better prepare yourself and avoid temptation while you shop.

### Making healthy food choices with your kids

Want to teach your kids about healthy eating? Bring them along on your next grocery trip and let them help you shop. Sheehan-Smith suggests letting the kids pick a healthy new food they want to try, whether it's fresh, frozen, canned or dried, during each trip.

"As children get older, they can help plan the menu at home and then pick out the foods to match the menu items while shopping followed by preparing the meal at home," she says.

NHLBI also encourages parents to stand firm when kids ask for foods high in sugars and fats. Talk to your kids about why these foods don't promote good health, and show them some tasty and nutritious alternatives.



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