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Shop Smart at the Grocery Store

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Grocery shopping can be an overwhelming task! It may be difficult to budget, know which items you should purchase, or which items you should avoid. Use these tips to make your shopping trip as healthy and budget-friendly as possible.

1. EAT BEFORE YOU SHOP

Be sure to have something to eat before grocery shopping. We are more likely to buy extra impulse items that are not on our list when we are hungry, which can cause us to spend extra money. Also, impulse purchases are often foods that are high in salt, sugar, and calories. Eating before you head to the store can save you money and help you make healthier choices!

If you arrive at the store hungry, try and buy a piece of fruit, a cheese stick, or a protein bar for a quick snack to eat before or while you shop. Remember to keep the receipt with you so you can shop safely and eat at the same time.

2. BRING A GROCERY LIST

Shopping with a list saves money and time! If you plan what you need for the week, write it down, and bring the list to the store, you are less likely to buy items you don't need. Having a list also makes it easier to avoid impulse buys.

It may help to set aside time one or two days a week to plan meals, make a grocery list, and shop. Just don't forget your list when you go to the store!

3. SHOP THE EDGES

Grocery stores tend to keep all shelf-stable items in the center. They put more fresh and less processed foods on the edges or walls of the grocery store. Instead of walking through each inner aisle, stick to the edges of the store and enter an inner aisle only when you need something.

Certain aisles are dedicated to snack and dessert foods such as candies, chips, cookies, and soda. When possible, avoid entering these aisles completely. It is common to make impulse purchases in these aisles. Many of these foods have added sugar and added salt. These foods can have a negative impact on your health.

4. SKIM THE CENTER DISPLAYS

Grocery stores use the area at the end of each aisle (end caps) to display sale items or food that they want to sell you. These are often foods like soda, chips, fruit juice boxes, or cereal. Give them a quick look to see if the item is on your list or a staple in your house. But, most of the time, you can skip these displays as they usually don't contain healthy items.

5. SHOP IN BULK, IF POSSIBLE

Shopping in bulk is often cheaper than buying those foods in pre-packaged boxes or bags. This can be a great way to buy oatmeal, brown rice, flour, dried beans, lentils, or nuts.

Fruits and vegetables can also be bought in bulk, either canned, frozen, or fresh. If you are buying them fresh, freeze what you cannot use! Prepping and freezing certain foods together can also help with cooking later on!

It is important to note that not all foods can be frozen. Therefore be mindful when purchasing perishable items such as eggs, milk, and certain produce such as lettuce in bulk. If these foods cannot be used before they go bad, they may not be cost-effective.

6. AVOID PRE-MADE DELI FOODS

Grocery stores know that we are often looking for quick and easy options. Many stores offer a variety of pre-made foods in the deli section. While quick and easy, these options are often expensive when compared to the homemade version. These items also tend to be higher in salt, fat, sugar, or calories. Making these foods or meals at home is almost always healthier and more cost-effective.

7. FOCUS ON FOOD SAFETY

When shopping, it is important to keep food safety in mind. To keep your food safe for consumption, shop for all your perishable items at the end of your shopping trip. Refrigerated and frozen foods should stay as cold as possible for as long as possible. If you shop the aisles, start on the side of your store that is farthest away from the dairy, meat, and produce. By the time you reach the area with perishable food items, you are almost done shopping, and those foods will spend less time outside of a refrigerator or freezer.
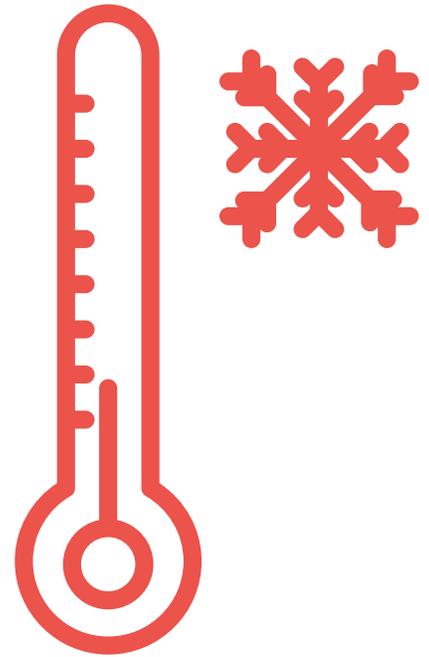
When shopping for frozen foods, check for big chunks of food stuck together. This can mean the food has been thawed and refrozen, affecting the flavor, texture, and nutrients of the food. It can also cause bacterial growth in the food.

Shopping at a Convenience Store

Just like grocery stores, convenience stores are designed to lead you to buy more processed foods and sale items. The healthiest foods will often be grouped together or near one other.

Get to know your convenience store and the layout so that you can quickly find the aisles that have healthier food options. Since these stores are usually smaller, items may not be where you typically find them. For example, the brown rice may be located in the chip aisle. Knowing where foods are can prevent you from lingering and making impulse buys. Convenience stores often have limited healthy food options, so only shop at these stores when needed. For example, if you are traveling or do not have a grocery store nearby.

Shopping Online

If you do any or all of your shopping online, you know that it can be a great time saver and help you stick to your list. However, advertisements will pop up that are designed to distract you. Here are some tips on how to shop smart online.

First, start shopping in the sections on your list and using the search function instead of browsing. This will help you find exactly what you need and will limit impulse buys. When shopping online, you have the benefit of not having to walk down any specific aisles in the store. This means you can completely skip the "Cookie, Candy and Snacks" section!

**Before you check out, review your order.**
- **Check to see if you have made any impulse purchases.**
- **Check the amount (number and unit) of each item that you've selected. There is a big difference between 4 single apples and 4 pounds of apples.**
- **Make any adjustments you need to fit your budget.**

From Lesson to Action

On your next trip to the store, identify the aisles and areas of the grocery store that offer the healthiest foods.

What two tips can you use during your next shopping trip to help promote healthier purchases?
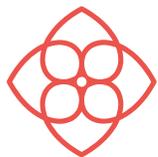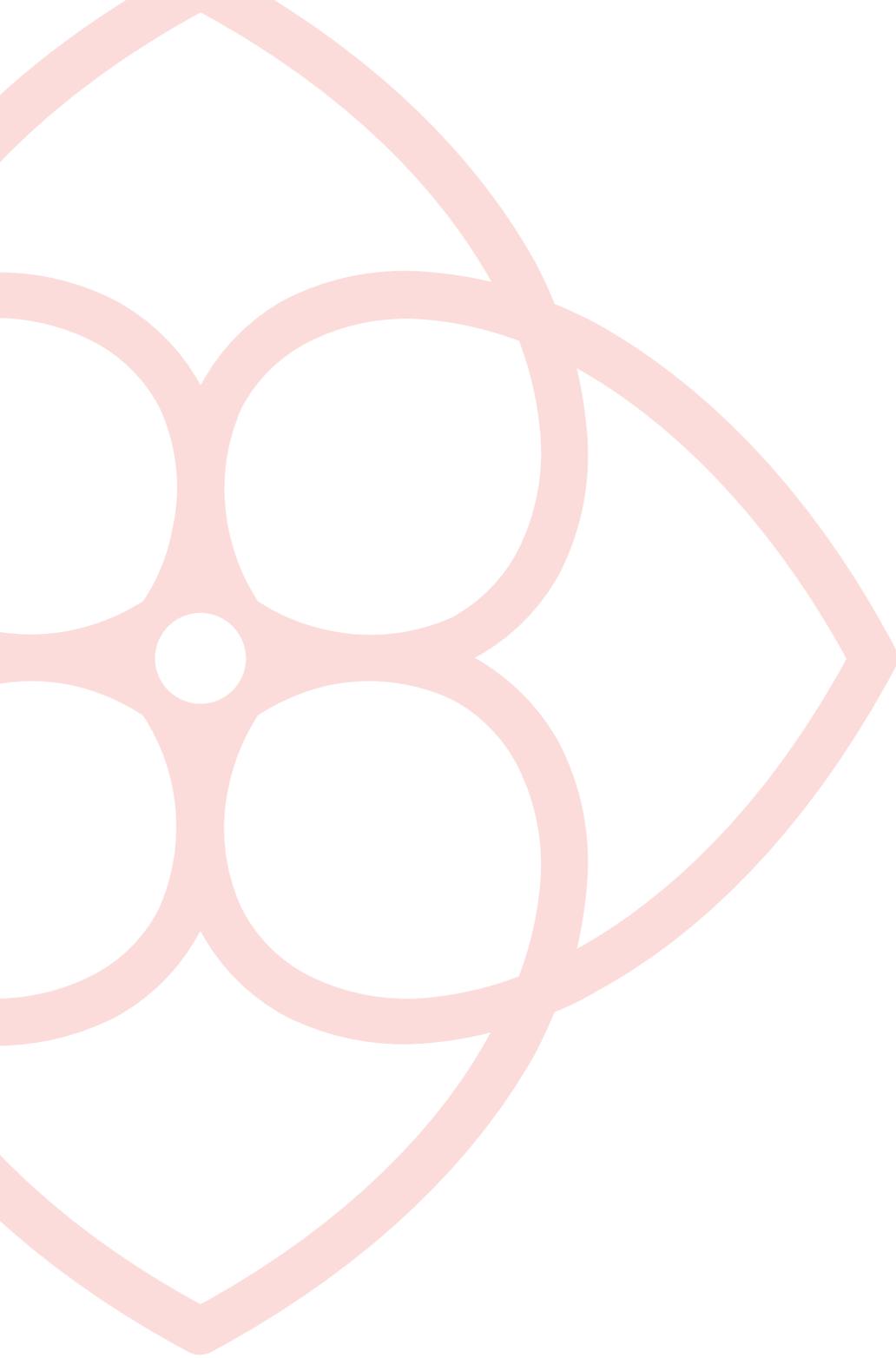
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Food is healthcare.**

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