

Mastering Food Choices

Navigating the Grocery Store

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Have you ever heard that shopping the perimeter of a grocery store is healthier? Many healthy foods are on the outer walls of the store, yet several other healthy options are also tucked in the middle aisles. If you know what you are looking for and how to find them, several items in the middle of the store should be on your grocery list.

An accurate way to find healthy foods is to use MyPlate as a guide while shopping in your local grocery store or food retailer.

Fruits

Purchasing fruits in the produce section is a great way to start your shopping trip. Check for fruits in season because these will most likely be on sale. Fruits can also be found in the middle aisles—canned and frozen. When purchasing these items, look for products packaged in 100 percent fruit juice or with no added sugar. Remember, these foods are good



for those with a sweet tooth because of their natural sugar. Fruits may help you skip the cookie and candy aisle.

Vegetables

Similar to fruits, shop for vegetables in the produce section by what is on sale and in

season. A good way to always have vegetables on hand in your house is to shop in the canned food and freezer aisles. Look for canned vegetables labeled low sodium or no salt added. For frozen vegetables, choose options without sauces or butter. Buying plain vegetables allows

you to incorporate them into different meals, season them yourself, and keep the extra calories down.

Grains

You will find grain products all over the grocery store; you should identify products that are whole grains. In the bakery and bread aisle, look for products that list whole grains as the first ingredient on the ingredients list, which means whole grains are the most abundant ingredient in the product. Several inner aisles also carry healthy, shelf-stable whole grain options that are good to have in stock at home, such as whole grain pasta, oats, and brown rice. In many cases, whole grain products cost the same as the comparable refined grain options.

Protein

Along the outer walls of a traditional grocery store you will find the deli and the meat department. When shopping in these sections, choose lean meat options such as chicken and turkey. These items will have much lower levels of saturated fat than other animal products. Look for lunch meats that are low in sodium or labeled reduced sodium. Remember there are several healthy protein options within the aisles of your grocery store as well. Canned tuna or salmon are shelf-stable



and are an excellent source of protein. Dried beans and lentils are an excellent source of protein and are wallet-friendly. Canned beans can also be a great option; however, look for low sodium options and be sure to rinse before use. Finally, nuts and seeds are a protein-rich option that serves as an excellent snack.

Dairy

Dairy products such as milk and cheese tend to be a staple on everyone's grocery list. When purchasing milk, keep in mind that low-fat varieties have the same amount of calcium without the extra fat and calories found in whole milk. Be mindful of added sugar in flavored milks. When purchasing cheese, look for labels that specify made with low-fat or skim milk. When purchasing other dairy items such as yogurt, look for no added sugar

or natural fruit as a sweetener. Even better, purchase non-fat plain yogurt and add your own fruit and nuts for a topping.

Other Things to Keep in Mind

- Skip the soda aisle and choose water. This choice will save money and also significantly reduce the amount of sugar in your diet.
- As for fruit and vegetable juices, look for labels that specify no added sugar or 100 percent fruit juice. If possible, choose the whole fruit or vegetable rather than juice to receive all the nutrients and fiber the produce has to offer.
- Avoid the chips, cookies, and cracker aisles. These food products are typically made with highly processed, refined grains with high amounts of trans fats and added sugar.

- Choose a checkout aisle with less candy and snack food options to reduce temptation, especially if children are participating in the grocery shopping trip.

Not Just the Grocery Store

Many of these healthy foods may be available at other locations including retail supercenters, dollar stores, wholesale clubs, farmer's markets, and convenience stores. Take a survey of the food retailers that are located in your community and where your best options are for healthy foods. MyPlate can be used as a guide for food and beverage purchases regardless of the type of food retailer.

Resources

Create a Grocery Game Plan Grocery List. https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/budget/grocery_list_interactive.pdf.

USDA Ten Tips Nutrition Series

Save More at the Grocery Store. <https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet-37SaveMoreAtTheGroceryStore.pdf>.

Eating Better on a Budget. <https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet-16EatingBetterOnABudget.pdf>.

Smart Shopping for Veggies and Fruits. <https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet9SmartShopping.pdf>.

References

United States Department of Agriculture. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. <https://www.cnpp.usda.gov/2015-2020-dietary-guidelines-americans>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/.

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