

SMART SHOPPING TIPS FOR LESS GROCERY TRIPS

Tip 1. Make a List, Check it Twice

To minimize your risk of exposure, make a list of everything you need before you head out to the store. Not only will this save you time, it will also help save you money by avoiding impulse purchases. There are several available apps, which can help make the grocery list process much easier than that old paper and pen method. Some of the top-rated apps include: AnyList, Yummly, Grocery IQ, ListEase, Target Cartwheel, and OurGroceries. Apps, such as AnyList and OurGroceries, allow you to link all of your family members under one account. This helps streamline the grocery shopping list process so that everyone can add any necessary items at their leisure and in real-time. Additionally, several apps help organize groceries by category (i.e. dairy, frozen food, produce, etc.) and contain bonus features such as: a built-in cost analysis tool, nutrition scores of food items, and recipe ideas.

Tip 2. Be a Believer in the Freezer

It is no secret that fresh produce spoils faster than frozen, but did you know that frozen produce is actually more nutritious than the fresh alternatives? When fresh fruits and vegetables are being harvested, they are often picked before they are ripe. This allows time for them to fully ripen during transportation. However, they are not given ample time to develop a full range of vitamins, minerals, and natural antioxidants. In the U.S., produce may spend anywhere from three days to several weeks in transit before arriving at a distribution center, an additional 1–3 days on display in the supermarket, and up to 7 days in our homes before being eaten. Certain vitamins and antioxidants, such as Vitamin C, begin to decline immediately after harvesting. The longer these produce items are exposed to oxygen, the faster their nutritional value declines.

Freezing methods help preserve important nutrients and beneficial plant compounds. When produce is being harvested to be frozen, they are picked at the peak time of ripeness, at their greatest nutrient density, and then flash frozen under a nitrogen atmosphere. Exposing fruits and vegetables to nitrogen helps preserve nutrients, which differs greatly from oxygen which breaks nutrients down. Unlike fruit, vegetables are blanched prior to freezing, which helps prevent discoloration, browning, and loss of flavor. The high heat involved in the blanching process can cause up to a 50% loss of Vitamin C. However, because these vegetables are already being harvested at their peak, this helps to offset any nutrients that are lost during blanching. Therefore, frozen options rank higher nutritionally when compared to commercially fresh produce.

When purchasing frozen produce, choose varieties that are free from added sodium, sauce, or sugar. Do not boil frozen vegetables or expose them to high temperatures, as it will decrease the nutritional value, particularly of Vitamin C. Instead, steam, roast, sauté, grill, or microwave them. Frozen vegetables cost a great deal less than fresh, making your wallet happy.

Tip 3. You CAN Do It

Canned vegetables, protein, and fruit serve as acceptable alternatives when fresh items are limited in their availability. Not only are they more shelf stable than fresh foods, but they are also more affordable. When purchasing canned beans or vegetables, ensure to buy the low sodium or “no salt added” versions. If you are unable to find these versions, you can empty the can into a colander and run it under water to remove any excess salt prior to preparation. For canned fish, purchase the varieties packed in water instead of oil. For canned fruit, purchase fruit packed in 100% fruit juice instead of the versions packed in sugary syrups. Do not be afraid to experiment with recipes using canned good items in place of fresh foods.

Tip 4. Whole Grain is the Name of the Game

Eating a diet rich in whole grains can reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some cancers. Whole grains are packed with fiber, which helps promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the colon, while also keeping our digestive system functioning properly. Fiber helps us stay full for a longer period of time, which is useful for managing weight. In addition to fiber, whole grains also contain important nutrients such as: protein, fiber, B vitamins (riboflavin, thiamine, and niacin), and trace minerals (iron, zinc, copper, and magnesium). Healthy options include brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat, barley, farro, millet, sorghum, 100% whole wheat bread, Triscuit crackers, Ak Mak crackers, corn tortillas, 100% whole wheat pasta, oatmeal (plain), and air-popped popcorn (plain). Not only are these foods important for your health, but they are also shelf stable. This makes them a perfect addition to your shopping list during a time when trips to the grocery store are less frequent. Items such as brown rice and quinoa can be purchased in both microwavable and frozen pouches, reducing cook and prep time. When selecting these items, be sure they are free of added sodium or sauces. You can extend the shelf life of items such as 100% whole wheat bread, bread, and corn tortillas, by placing them in the freezer.

Tip 5. Embrace Plant-Based

It seems as though animal protein such as beef, pork, chicken, fish, and eggs are hard to come by these days when grocery shopping. Instead of waiting it out, incorporate more plant-based protein products into your diet. Plant-based protein such as nuts, seeds, tofu, edamame, nut butters, lentils, beans, and some grains such as quinoa and amaranth, are packed with fiber, calcium, and many other important vitamins and minerals. They are also free of cholesterol and contain virtually no saturated fat.

When grocery shopping during a pandemic, it is important to remind yourself to be flexible. The store may not carry your usual brand during this time, so do your best to select something similar. Remember to only take what you will actually use and respect the needs of others, particularly the immunocompromised and elderly. Items can always be placed in the freezer to extend shelf life and reduce unnecessary trips to the market. Stay healthy and happy shopping!

Sources:

www.healthline.com/nutrition/fresh-vs-frozen-fruit-and-vegetables#section3
www.cnn.com/2019/05/30/health/frozen-fruit-vegetables-drawer-food/index.html