

Grocery Shopping Tips: Healthy Food Choices

The items we put in our grocery shopping carts week after week can boost kids' health — and give them a positive attitude toward nutritious food. But those tempting displays of tasty snacks and fruity drinks can make it easy to end up with a cart overloaded with stuff that doesn't offer much nutrition.

These tips can help you keep the focus on healthy options:

Make a List

A list can keep you on track, especially if you base it on a meal plan for the week. Focus your week's menus on wholesome, nutritious ingredients such as fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, lean meats, poultry, and fish, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.

When feeding your family:

- Serve vegetables and fruits every day.
- Limit juice and sugary drinks.
- Use vegetable oils, such as olive and canola, instead of butter, shortening, or lard. Choose whole-grain rather than refined-grain breads, cereals, pasta, and rice. Choose nonfat or low-fat milk and dairy products.
- Serve more fish.
- Reduce salt.

Follow a Healthy Path in the Store

If you shop in a grocery store, focus your shopping on the store's outer aisles. These usually contain the healthiest foods — produce, dairy products, and fresh meat and fish.

Next, move to the inner aisles, where you'll find important items like canned and frozen fruits and vegetables, cereals, and baking supplies. But those inner aisles also contain less healthy foods and snacks. When it comes to making healthy choices, visit these aisles later in your shopping trip and avoid snack aisles altogether.

Choosing and Storing Produce

When possible, choose fruits and vegetables that are in season. Buying in-season produce is often a bargain in taste and price. Visit farmer's markets and produce stands in your area for the best that local growers have to offer, but try not to buy more than you can use or store before it spoils.

From green beans to cantaloupe, all fruits and vegetables give hints about their ripeness and freshness:

- Choose vegetables that look fresh and colorful. Most should be crisp and firm. Don't buy vegetables if they're limp or showing signs of decay.
- When choosing fruits, avoid bruised pieces, but remember that a perfect exterior doesn't necessarily mean the best quality.

Careful storage means that fresh produce will last longer. Some vegetables will keep in the refrigerator for a couple of days. Others, including cabbage and root vegetables like carrots, will keep even longer. Store potatoes and onions in a cool, dark place for maximum freshness. Plan to use delicate fruits and vegetables first, and hardier ones later in the week.

Make Room for a Treat

Instead of taking a hard line or completely giving in, find a balance. Try not to talk about "bad foods," and let your kids choose an occasional treat at the grocery store or at home.