

Simplifying Grocery Shopping

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For obvious reasons, the holidays seem to bring about frequent grocery shopping trips. Grocers and food manufacturers are well aware of effective product placements to entice you to buy at every turn of the cart. There are plenty of nutritious foods in grocery stores but finding your way to them can feel like you are walking through a minefield of temptation. Food manufacturers also use misleading or confusing health claims to make you believe you can skip that trip to the doctor by simply eating more of a particular food. And remember, supermarkets want you to spend money and are designed so that the easiest route leads to soda as opposed to broccoli! The more time you spend wandering the aisles, the more products you see and the more you are likely to spend. How can we simplify those trips and help you sort through the temptations holidays or not? Here are some helpful tips and things to be aware of:

The products that have the “prime real estate” – eye level, ends of aisles and by the cash registers – are the most profitable, most heavily advertised and more likely to be junk food. In short, be aware and steer clear.

Approximately \$12 billion is spent per year on direct media advertising for food products. Kellogg alone spends \$32 million annually just on advertising Cheez-Its snack crackers. Those ads are aimed at us!

Grocery stores are 48,000 square feet on average and contain about 50,000 different items for sale. Usually, a quarter of the store space is devoted to sugar-added products.

Consider that the dairy case is in the back of each store. So those of us just “popping in” for that gallon of milk have to navigate several aisles and pass hundreds of products before you reach your goal. How many times does that one gallon of milk turn into an armful of a variety of products? And if you’re hungry – watch out!

Keep your focus on the perimeter of the store for the most part – produce, dairy, lean meats rather than on the packaged and processed foods in the center aisles. Many of the center aisle products are considered refined carbohydrates and have very little fiber, lack nutrients, and are loaded with calories, bad fats and added sugars.

Center aisle shopping isn’t all bad if you choose wisely. Here are some tips to help you:

Frozen fruits and vegetables can be very healthy choices as long as they don’t have added sugars and fats. Fruits and veggies that are frozen tend to be picked at their peak ripeness which typically means they are at their highest in nutrient content as well.

Breads and cereals must have the word “whole” listed in the first ingredient to be considered a whole grain. Example: “100% stone ground whole wheat.” Just because the front of the package or name states whole grain doesn’t mean it is. If sugar is the second ingredient, beware.

Buying products with cartoons on the package is almost certain to be a junk food.

Look for products with less than 5 ingredients. This usually indicates less processing.

Try not to buy artificial anything because typically it's disguising bad taste.

Don't be fooled by products that are touted as health foods like yogurt-covered raisins, power bars or energy drinks. They're usually loaded with extra calories and sweeteners.

Just because you see "Fat Free" or "0 grams of Transfats" doesn't mean it really is. Products can contain up to 0.5 grams of fat per serving and still be called "fat free" or "transfat free."

Look for nutrient dense foods that are loaded with nutrients like vitamins, minerals, fiber, versus just calories of sugars and fats. For instance, choose potatoes over potato chips, apples over applesauce or juice, whole grains over white breads, fresh/frozen fruits over canned. The more processed and refined a product is, the lower the nutrient value.

Hopefully this information will make those grocery store "pitfalls" easier to avoid especially as you frequent your neighborhood market more often this holiday season.