

Nutrition News

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Food Budgeting

Cutting Food Costs – Planning, Shopping and Buying

Coupon Common Sense

Many of us do not get as much from our food dollars as we could. Using coupons, however, often can save several dollars a week on groceries.

Smart shoppers take the time to look for, cut out, file and use cents-off coupons. Refund forms and other money-saving offers also can be found in newspapers, magazines and in the stores.

Coupons are easy to use, but keep them in a place where you can find them quickly. A shoe box works well as an inexpensive filing cabinet. Group your coupons into categories like cereals, pizzas, cake mixes, paper goods, pet food, etc. and place them in separate envelopes that you label with the group names. Put all the envelopes in the shoe box. Now, you can readily find what you need.

When you're ready to shop, find a used envelop and write your list on the back of it. Place a mark beside the items you'll be buying with a coupon. Put your coupons inside this envelop. If you will be going to more than one store, make a shopping list on a separate envelop for each store, and add the coupons you want to use at that store. This method will save you time.

You might be surprised that some coupon users actually end up spending more money than non-coupon users. The reason is that coupons are usually for brand name, higher-priced items that cost more even with coupons. To avoid this trap, use coupons to buy only items you use often, things you would like to try for the first time or items already on sale. Also, to avoid the trap, compare coupon prices with store-brand or generic products to see which offers the best value.

Many stores have coupons you can use only at their store. These may mean a bonus for you. Often, you can use these in-store coupons along with brand-name coupons for extra savings. For example, if a store has a 40-cents-off, in-store coupon on an item, and you have a 50-cents-off coupon for the same item, you can save a total of 90 cents.

To get the most from your coupons, try the following ideas:

- Use coupons for foods you normally eat, rather than for "extras."
- Check your grocery receipt; sometimes coupons are on the back.
- Check online for coupons from the store where you shop or for products you buy.
- Shop on double- or triple-coupon days when a store increases the value of coupons.
- Use store loyalty cards that offer in-store discounts to cardholders.
- Don't buy items you don't need.
- Watch the weekly store ads. Buy the item you want when it is on sale, and use a coupon for extra savings.
- Shop at stores that will take manufacturers' coupons and the in-store coupon for the same product.
- Pay attention to refund offers. A product may be marked at a special price to promote a refund offer. Be sure to keep the sales receipt, the refund-offer form and the "proof-of-purchase" together. You also may find offers on the package itself.
- Take your coupon box with you each time you shop. Things may be on sale that are not on your list but are good buys.
- Clip every coupon you can find, and get involved in a coupon exchange. Some stores have bins of unwanted coupons. You can find coupons for items you often use and share those you will not be using.

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Sources: University of Nebraska at Lincoln Extension and University of Illinois Extension.

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To find out more, contact your parish agent.