

# Nutrition News

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A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

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## Food Budgeting

### Avoid Costly Supermarket Traps

Most often, grocery shopping is not something that most of us look forward to. It can be very stressful. And a dollar's going to stretch only so far. So to help you keep your sanity during grocery store visits, we have put together a quick guide to help you avoid costly supermarket traps.

- Make a list of items you need for the week, and stick to your list. Avoid temptations.
- Use coupons for those foods on your list and not for extras that you didn't plan for.
- Check out weekly sales circulars, and plan meals around sale items.
- Shop at major supermarkets for the best choice at the lowest price.
- Avoid shopping when hungry. When hungry, everything looks good. So make sure to eat before you begin shopping.
- Try generic or store brands. Don't just shop at eye level; look at the lower shelves. This is where many store brands are located, and most are just as good nutritionally and in taste as major name brand items.
- Stock up on items such as flour, sugar, rice and canned goods when they are on sale. These items are called staples and will be used pretty regularly.
- Pay cash for food if possible. It is more economical to pay cash than to buy on credit.
- Use only those aisles where the items you want to buy are. Don't browse through the rest of the store, or you will find items you think you will need.

#### What to avoid:

- Displays of food along the aisles or ends of aisles. These are usually placed there to lure shoppers to pick them up. They may not be on any special sale.
- Prepared foods. If you can make it from scratch, it will be cheaper than buying it ready-made.
- Using coupons for items you won't use. If left unused or gone to waste, the items weren't a bargain even with a coupon.
- Picking up items near the cash register. They have been put there so you would pick them up while you wait your turn.
- Taking children to the store. If you have children, leave them at home so they won't pick up expensive items you cannot afford or don't want.
- The candy, snack food and magazine aisles. They are there to tempt you.
- Buying non-food items at the grocery store. You can find better bargains for laundry, personal care and paper products in discount stores.

By using these tips you will avoid costly traps and also get the most out of your food dollar!

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## Comparison-Shopping for Grocery Items

If you look closely at the price labels on grocery store shelves, you will see not only the price of the whole item but also the item's unit price. The unit might be grams, ounces or cups, depending on what the item is. To find the best price for an item, compare the unit prices of different brands of the same item. Many times you will discover that store-brand products are a better deal – even better than brand-name items with coupons. Usually, a larger item has a smaller unit price; however, it is only a better buy if you can use all of it. If you end up buying too much and throwing some away, it is not a good buy.

## Beware of Marketing Strategies

Avoid marketing ploys designed to draw your attention to a particular product. Just because items are in a bin in the middle of the floor with a price tag does not mean that they are on sale. They might be there to move them along and make people think they are on sale. Many grocery stores also display ready-to-eat items, such as marinated or stuffed meat and chicken meals, and group them with side dishes that complete the meal. These are quick solutions for someone who is in a hurry, but they are not cheap. You can prepare the same meals from scratch at home for a lot less.

## Don't Forget Nutrition

If a package attracts you because of its design, make sure to look at its nutrition facts label. Read the list of ingredients – these are listed in the order of their amount in the product. For example, if the first ingredient is sugar, the product has more sugar in it than any other ingredient. Or, if you want whole-wheat bread, look for “whole wheat” in the first part of the ingredients list, not in the last part. Similarly, if you want to cut fat from your diet, read the label for how much fat the food contains by serving. If the majority of the calories come from fat, be careful. By reading the label you can get a better idea of what the fat-to-calorie ratio is as well as other valuable nutritional information.

## Watch the Scanner

This is the last point where you can check that you are getting the right price. Some advertised sale items are not in the system, so keep an eye on the scanner as they go through. It is also a good idea to have the store circular on hand in case you find discrepancies. At times, grocery stores give deep discounts to “members only.” You can get special deals such as two-for-one or third-one-free if you become a member, so keep the membership card handy for them to scan.

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To find out more, contact your parish agent.