

Navigating the grocery store

We all have to go to the grocery store. I am just like you. If I go when I am hungry, I buy too much. If I am not careful, I buy things I don't need. If I go with kids, I almost always buy unnecessary items or things that are not as healthy as I would like. If I don't pay attention with coupons, I will end up with products I really don't use. So in light of all of this, how should we navigate the grocery store?

I have some tips for you, but first, let me share the way I have used the grocery store as a means of encouraging my kids and grandkids to eat more veggies. When you have 5 kids and 5 grandkids, you run out of time to do one-on-one activities. I found a great answer to that problem, which is also a great help to eating and trying new fruits and veggies. I try to take 1 kid with me to the store each time I go. Their job is to find a new fruit or veggie they personally have never tried. We try to ask the produce folks about the new discovery, but you know how that goes. We are often met with that blank stare and the words, "Look folks, I just put the stuff out." So we often come home and start our own research. Since we have the Internet, the job is easy. In just a click of a mouse, we can find everything we need - how to prepare it, what nutrients it has, what goes with it, the whole shebang. The only thing left is to prepare it and taste it.

If at all possible, try to add a "fun" flair that goes along with the ingredient. For example, when we try new oriental veggies, we have to eat them with chopsticks to get the full effect, not to mention kids will eat anything if you give them chopsticks! Sometimes it requires special music, like when we tried jicama and we had to have mariachi music to set the mood. This takes all the focus off the food item and onto the experience, which helps them at least taste the new fruit or veggie.

We have found some great new veggies and fruits this way, but we have had a few we wouldn't buy again. All in all, it is a wonderful experience and a memory the kids won't forget. To be a smarter shopper, try these tips for navigating the grocery store.

We all have to eat and go to the grocery store. You can make better choices if you follow these few simple rules.

1. As much as possible, shop the perimeter of the store. The outside aisles contain the most natural products.
2. Start with the produce aisle and make as many of the choices there as you can. Remember to choose fruits and vegetables in as many colors as possible. Each color has a different nutrient profile.
3. Choose organic whenever you can in the produce aisle.
4. Make sure you have enough produce to have at least 9 servings a day. Use lots of VARIETY!
5. When you are in the dairy and egg aisle, choose free-range eggs or organic, if they have them. Most stores carry rice and soy milk, making it very easy to avoid dairy. If you are buying milk, be sure to buy organic or at the very least, rBGH free. Recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) is a synthetic hormone that is marketed to dairy farmers to increase milk production). This ensures that you get the least amount of antibiotics.
6. If you are avoiding dairy, choose only vegan cheeses that don't contain caseinate. If you are buying dairy cheeses, choose organic. Choose real butter, antibiotic free, or an alternative that does not contain any hydrogenated fats.
7. As you get to the meat aisle, look for meats that do not have antibiotics or are organic. Laura's Lean beef or Amish chicken are good examples. Choose fish that is not farm raised. Choose the lowest fat cuts of your favorite meats.
8. As you continue in the middle aisles, look for whole grain products in the cereal aisle. Check the grams of sugar and don't choose any that have more than 3 grams of sugar.
9. In the bread aisle, choose 100 percent whole wheat bread, or those that only contain whole grains and no hydrogenated fats or preservatives.

10. In the canned food section, choose those products that have less fat and salt. Organic foods are showing up everywhere; buy organic whenever you can. Read ingredients carefully to see if there are ingredients that you cannot pronounce. If you can't pronounce it, don't buy it.
11. Be very particular in the snack aisle. It is hard to make wise choices here, but if you look for whole grains and lower fat, you might find a real gem. Many snacks are now organic, and several are all natural.
12. Avoid the pop/soda aisle altogether. Instead, choose flavored water and natural juices. Choose juices with low sugar content and no artificial colors. You should still only use juices rarely. Try herbal teas, such as Celestial Seasonings, with a few drops of stevia as a sweetener.
13. If you have a menu plan, you will avoid buying extra things you really don't want.

Making wise choices at the grocery store will help you improve your nutrition very quickly.