

Healthy Eating: Grocery Shopping



Shop right to eat well

If you want to eat healthy foods, you've got to be able to prepare healthy foods. This may seem simple, but if you're not used to shopping for healthy foods, it may mean some changes in your routine.

Plan ahead

The key to grocery shopping for healthy eating is to plan ahead. This may take some time at first, but after a while it gets easier.

- Plan a menu for your main meals. You may want to plan menus for a week or for 3 days. It's up to you. Do what works best.
- Choose meals based on how much time you have to prepare them. Use recipes that fit that time frame. For example, if you have 30 minutes to cook dinner, find a recipe that won't take longer than that to prepare.
- Make a list of what you need to buy. Take the list with you to the grocery store.

- Don't forget to plan for snacks. If your list includes fresh fruits or low-fat yogurt for snacks, you'll be less tempted to buy high-fat snacks.

You can also plan to double a recipe and divide it into meal portions to freeze for future meals. If you do this, be sure to adjust the amounts of ingredients on your shopping list.

What to buy

You now have your list in hand. But what do you buy?

Try to choose foods lower in fat, calories, and sodium. For example, if you need to buy cheese, buy low-fat or fat-free cheese. White cheeses tend to be lower in fat. If you buy meat, "loin" and "round" cuts have less fat.

It's also a good idea to limit drinks with added sugar, such as soda and sweetened iced tea. Instead, try to drink more water or buy sugar-free drinks or drinks with little or no added sugar.

Put some healthy convenience foods and snacks on your shopping list. These are great to have on hand if you are busy or don't like to cook.

Here are some suggestions:

- Buy bagged, precut vegetables or salad greens that you can either steam to have with dinner or eat raw as a snack.
- Use healthy frozen entrees on days when you don't have time to prepare a meal. Be sure they are lower in fat, calories, and sodium. Add a salad or fruit and a glass of milk to round out your meal.
- Try trail mix with nuts and dried fruit. In small portions, this makes a healthy, satisfying snack.
- Buy easy-to-eat fruits, such as apples, grapes, or oranges. All you have to do is wash them.

- Combine low-fat string cheese with whole-grain crackers or fruit.
- Buy small containers of yogurt or applesauce.

Tips for shopping

Eat a meal or snack before you shop so you aren't hungry at the store. You won't be so tempted to buy less healthy foods, such as candy, chips, or fast food, to satisfy your hunger.

Watch the aisles you shop in. The items on the outer aisles of the store are often fresh foods, such as meat, produce, and dairy. These items tend to be less processed compared with some of the foods in the center aisles, which are often foods such as packaged cookies, chips, or soda.

Try to buy just what's on your shopping list. Sale items may seem like a good bargain, but if you weren't planning to buy them in the first place, they may not be a good deal.

Why planning helps

Planning your meals may help you make healthier food choices more often. It's easier to choose healthy foods when they are on hand and ready to eat.

Also, knowing that you have a quick and easy-to-make meal at home may help you overcome the urge to pick up fast food for dinner.

Some healthy food choices

Breads and grains	Meat, fish, and poultry	Fats and oils
Whole wheat bread and bagels or whole-grain crackers	Fresh fish and shellfish (don't batter or fry fish)	Canola or olive oil
Oatmeal and other high-fiber, low-sugar cereals	White-meat chicken or turkey (remove the skin before eating)	Reduced-fat mayonnaise
Soft corn tortillas, low-fat flour tortillas, or whole wheat tortillas	Lean cuts of meat, like round, sirloin, or extra-lean ground beef	Margarine or spread with no trans fat and no more than 1/3 of the total fat from saturated fat