

8 Tips for Making the Most of Food Dollars

Resource: Tip Sheet

Topic Area: Procurement

Subtopic Area: Food Purchasing

1. Make a List

Make a list of needed items and stick to it! Use this tool to keep food costs low and save time in the store. Resist adding impulse purchases to the cart.

2. Search for the Best Deals

Each week, use store ads to find the best deals on foods. If a sales item has sold out, ask for a raincheck and keep it with your shopping list for future use. Some other great ways include store shopping reward programs, shopping apps, and social media groups.

3. Buy Foods When In-Season

In-season produce typically tastes better and is usually lower in price than those purchased out of season. Fresh fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, and fiber, which make these foods a nutritional bargain. Check out locally grown items at the farmer's market or local produce stand.

4. Vary the Protein

Plan meals and snacks that include a variety of protein-rich foods. For example, include poultry, beef, pork, nuts, seeds, tofu, beans, and peas. Not only is this a good idea nutrition-wise, but it also helps save money. As an added measure, choose legumes and beans weekly. These foods are usually lower in both cost and fat while higher in fiber.

5. Clip Coupons Wisely

Coupons can save food dollars but be smart about coupon use. For example, compare prices to be sure the item is less expensive with the coupon. Often a store brand will cost less than a national brand with a discount. Try to use coupons when an item is on sale for greater savings. If a coupon requires buying more than you need but cannot safely store, the waste is not a cost saver.

6. Store Foods Promptly

After shopping for perishable foods, store them within two hours. Keep these foods cold to assure full shelf life and quality. During hot weather, store a cooler in the car before heading to the grocery store. Afterward, place frozen and fresh foods in the cooler to keep them cool as you transport them back to the facility. For those who ride a bus or metro, buy a collapsible cooler bag to keep foods as cold.

7. Be Aware of Bulk Bins

Look for bulk bins of whole grains, spices, and other items. Bulk bin items are often less expensive per pound, in part because of limited packaging. Always compare the prices to ensure the bulk-bin items are the best price.

8. Check out the Total Cost

Use a calculator to keep track of the total estimated cost to reduce the risk of overspending. Pay close attention during check out for the correct amount. Speak up if an item's price is more than the advertised or shelf price. Save all receipts for documentation purposes.

Reference

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2017) *MyPlate*. www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlate

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