

Spending Your Food Dollar

“Almost everyone knows that steak costs more than hamburger; strawberries, when they are available, more than bananas; butter, more than margarine; Roquefort cheese, more than cottage cheese; and whipping cream, more than coffee cream. Therefore, the statement that the decision of what to serve for breakfast, lunch, and dinner determines how much money is spent for food is so obvious that it is ludicrous; yet some families fail to accept this fact. They would like to spend less for food, but wish to continue to eat what they want to eat; rarely can both be achieved.”

To enhance your food shopping skills, get acquainted with the supermarket—the services it offers, the personnel and major sections—then put the food shopping basics in action.

Moving through the supermarket calls for special skills and awareness because of the variety of food and nonfood items available. The following tips apply specifically to supermarket shopping:

Supermarket Shopping Tips:

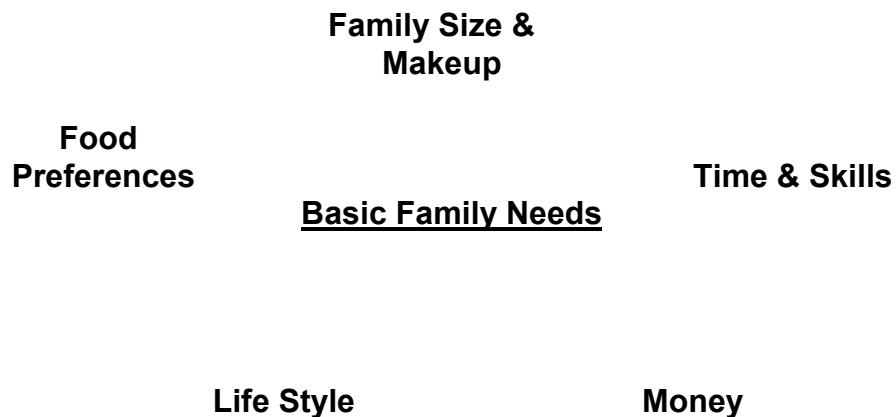
- Learn where things are in the stores where you shop frequently
- Shop systematically. . . up one aisle and down another to avoid backtracking or missing specials or items needed
- Ask for personal advice when you need it in self-service sections
- Handle merchandise with care and respect to help keep overhead down and control food prices
- Save time at checkout counters by having money or check ready, by unloading items with prices up and with multiple-priced things together
- Get to know your supermarket and department managers

In addition to one-stop shopping, modern supermarkets offer a variety of services to provide easy, convenient shopping for customers. Making the most of these services is one way to stretch food dollars and simplify food shopping. The following typical services may make shopping for food more convenient for you.

Supermarket services:

- check cashing
- free parking
- carry-out help
- express checkout counters
- convenient shopping hours
- bulletin board for use by customers
- recipes and product information services
- advice on quantity to buy and preparation techniques from meat section
- samples of new food products
- home economist services
- equipment rentals
- stores within the store including delicatessen, bakery, pharmacy, etc.
- unit pricing on all or some items packaged in nonstandard sizes
- open dating on perishable items

Sound food buying practices begin with personal and family needs. While every family is different, basic needs are illustrated below:



Family Needs:

Food preferences – What foods does the entire family enjoy?

Family Size and Makeup – How large is the family? How old are the youngsters?

Time and Skills – What are the homemaker's activities? Does he/she enjoy cooking?

Money – What is the family income? How much is the family willing to spend for food?

Life Style – What is the family's mode of living? Does the family entertain guests frequently?

Planned purchasing is the next step in smart buymanship. In buying foods this means planning menus and a shopping list.

Plan menus, keeping in mind the following factors:

- Family Needs
- Good Nutrition
- Variety and Appetite Appeal
- Wise Use of Leftovers

A shopping list saves time, helps control spending and avoids omitting items. Some tips for preparing a shopping list include:

- Keeping the list handy in the kitchen to write down items needed as foods and supplies run short.
- Checking both staples and the week's menus before going to the store to be sure all items needed are on the list.
- Organizing the list according to major sections in the store to save shopping time and avoid forgetting items.
- Adding specials advertised in the newspaper to the list when the prices are advantageous and the items fit into the over-all food plan.

Skillful shopping is the key to getting value for food dollars. The following set of skills applies specifically to buying foods.

Basics:

- Use a shopping list as a guide, but be flexible.
- Buy seasonal foods in season.
- Take advantage of low prices and specials or other price reductions.
- Buy the quantity best suited to needs and storage facilities.
- Buy the quality of food best suited to the intended use.
- Compare the costs five ways:
 - 1) different brands, grades of quality
 - 2) foods in different forms such as canned, frozen, fresh, dried
 - 3) different stores
 - 4) similar foods as pears vs. peaches or rolls vs. bread
 - 5) built-in convenience vs. made-from-scratch
- Read labels to determine contents, quantity, number of servings, preparation instructions, serving suggestions and other useful facts.

- Learn the desirable characteristics or features to look for in different types of food.
- Check condition of package or container.
- Consider cost per serving and amount of waste such as bones.
- Buy by the ounce or pound in foods where there is no waste.
- Figure costs of ingredients added to convenience foods.
- Store foods properly.
- Develop price awareness.

How, Where and When to Shop

Buying in quantity is the least expensive providing you have a need for the particular product. Large sizes usually give more value per ounce of food than smaller containers.

Where you shop affects the value you receive for the money spent. Prices vary among different stores so you must evaluate the relative merits of different stores and the convenience of their services.

When you shop will depend on your schedule of activities and amount of free time. Shopping when stores are well stocked and offer good buys is recommended.

Storing Food

Proper food storage prevents spoilage, and preserves the nutritive value, flavor and appearance of food. Food spoilage represents wasted money and can be one of the reasons for failure to keep spending within what your food budget will allow.