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How To Save Money On Groceries

By Jeffrey Strain

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Unlike a fixed monthly cost such as your mortgage or car payment, the amount you spend on groceries each month is somewhat flexible. While the common advice of clipping coupons and buying generic brands to save money while shopping is sound, by far the best way to truly keep your grocery shopping expenses under control is by understanding how grocery stores entice you to spend more than you really want. By fully understanding the ways grocery stores encourage you to spend, many of which you probably never even noticed before, you can combat their strategies and spend money only on the merchandise you really need.

Although a grocery store may appear to be simply a place to purchase food and other household necessities, in reality it's a cutting edge example of "how to sell more than consumers really need." Since you are the consumer, it's important that you realize these sales tactics so that you walk into a grocery store to get only what you need while avoiding everything else that the grocery store wants to sell you. Here are some ways that grocery stores manipulate you into spending more than you had planned and some simple steps you can take to counter them:

Smell: One of the first things you'll notice when you enter a grocery store is the mouth-watering smell. There is a specific reason why grocery stores smell of freshly baked goods, and also why the bakery is almost always found near the store entrance. The reason is that a bakery making bread and desserts gives off an enticing smell, and that smell is likely to make you hungry. The grocery store also knows that if you feel hungry while you shop, you are likely to spend more money – a lot more – than if you are not hungry.

A simple way that you can combat this is by going grocery shopping only after you have had a meal and are full. If timing doesn't allow for you to do this, at least drink a couple of glasses of water before leaving to make you feel full before shopping. Shopping while you're full makes it much easier to resist the great smelling temptations that the grocery store will flaunt in front of you.

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Overall Store Layout: Did you ever notice that when you only need to buy a few staple items, you have to travel the entire grocery store floor in order to get them? While one might assume that the convenience of putting basic staple items in the same general area would make happier customers, grocery stores know that the longer that they can keep you in the store, the more money you are likely to spend. They also know that making you walk as far as they can inside the store will make it more likely that you'll pick up impulse items. Stores are specifically designed in such a way as to make you spend as much time as possible inside them and walk the entire store floor to get the basic staples that everyone needs.

Although there is no way around going to the far corners of the store to get the groceries you need, you can avoid the trap of impulse purchases on the store floor by taking the time to make a list of the items you need and sticking to it when shopping. Getting into the habit of making a single trip once a week to take care of all your grocery shopping needs instead of several smaller trips throughout the week will also greatly reduce your time in the store and the chances that you'll buy items you don't really need.

Item Display Layout: Manufactures of brand named products pay hefty stocking fees to stores to have their merchandise placed on the shelves at adult eye level (and child eye level in the case of products aimed at children such as cereal). Manufactures are willing to pay these prices because they know that you are much more likely to purchase something that you can easily see as you are walking down the aisle than something you have to stop and search for. The result is that the products placed at eye level are usually the most expensive.

Before grabbing the first item you see, take a few seconds to look at the upper and lower shelves. Similar products are placed together and simply looking will often reveal the same product at a much better price.

"Sale" Merchandise: Grocery stores will advertise a certain number of items at rock bottom prices (called "loss leaders") to get you to come to the store. While these can be genuine bargains, don't get fooled into thinking that everything that has the words "sale" or "bargain" above it is really that. While aisle ends are reserved for these "bargains," they aren't always the deals they seem to be and the discounted products are often displayed along side higher price products. You can sometimes even find similar products in the regular aisle section that are less than the end of aisle "sale" merchandise.

The important thing to remember when grocery shopping is to focus on the price of the product and not all the fancy advertising and slogans promoting the product. Take the time to check the other brands and see if there is a better deal. Also, remember that if you weren't planning to buy the item and you don't really need it, then it really isn't a bargain for you no matter what the price. Only consider those items that you regularly use and you have a need for.

Product Appearance: Product packaging at grocery stores is bright, usually in red and yellows since these colors attract the eye. Just because something grabs your attention, however, doesn't mean that you have to buy it. Keep focused on your shopping list and don't get distracted by products you don't really need.

Packaging will also be much larger than the actual product for many food items. Manufacturers know

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that shoppers assume that larger sized packaging equals a better deal. It would make sense since bulking items together saves the manufacturer on packaging, shipping and stocking which they can pass along to you. With a mantra "buy in bulk" now firmly grounded in most people's minds as a way to save money, manufacturers are taking advantage of this. While still not the norm, more and more larger sized packages are less of a deal than their smaller sized counterparts since manufacturers know you will make the above assumptions and probably not compare the per unit cost.

Before grabbing the largest box of a product, take the time to calculate the per unit or per weight cost. More often than you would expect, smaller packages of an item are actually a better deal than buying the same item in a larger package.

Check-Out Layout: The check out aisle of a store is like a mini mart in itself. This is because grocery stores know that they have a captive audience while you wait in line to pay for your groceries. They squeeze in every little thing that might remotely peak your interest to rack up a large amount on impulse sales.

The best way to avoid these temptations is to plan your shopping during off peak hours. Avoid the weekend if at all possible since this is when grocery stores are most crowded, as well as the evening when everyone has just gotten off work. With many grocery stores now staying open 24 hours a day,

late night and early morning trips when the aisle and check out lanes are practically bare are the perfect time to get in and out of the grocery store as quickly as possible.

By taking the time to understand how the grocery stores try to influence your shopping and spending habits, you have now put yourself in control. Utilize the suggestions about how to counter the grocery store's selling techniques and you will be able to control your grocery spending to a much greater extent and should have a much easier time keeping to your monthly food budget.

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Jeffrey Strain has published hundreds of money saving articles and the creator of the Daily Money Saving Challenge Program. He is the co-owner of

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How To Save 1/3 off Your Grocery Bill

By L C Peterson

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Want to spend less on food? Today my family is spending on average, one-third less on our grocery bill than we did last year. We are also able to go to the grocery store every other week and still have plenty of food in the house. How did we do this? This article is the first installment of a three part series on how we made these significant savings in our food spending.

In order to save money on groceries we first took a long look at our shopping habits. We occasionally took advantage of sales, yet had no organization to our menus, food storage, or shopping. We went to the store "between trips" and often ate poorly if both of us were sick at the same time. We wanted a change.

Our first purchase was a food sealer. I had been looking at sealers before, thinking we threw a lot of food away. We often had left overs three days in a row. I thought there had to be a better way without cooking more meals or ordering delivery. The purchase of a food sealer has been very helpful in saving money. We use leftovers when we want and not just the first few days after the meal is cooked. The food can be saved in meal size packages and micro waved or boiled.

Saving money on groceries will in all likelihood mean you need more pantry space. Modern kitchens rarely have enough. We started with a small closet in our kitchen but it was not enough. A wooden storage cabinet left over from a previous job ended up being perfect. Look around your house and find a closet or some other space that is dry and dark.

Our third step in saving was to purchase an additional freezer. Luckily my husband received a one-time bonus at work just after we decided to make a change. We decided to buy a new freezer with this money. We owned a twenty year old freezer and wasn't sure how much longer it would last. After some time researching

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we bought an upright version with no bells or whistles; just a simple freezer. Some bulk buying of frozen stuff is needed to save as much as possible. How much freezer space do you have? Where can you put a freezer? Shop around and see what specials are available. Most families only need one freezer. Maybe you can share one.

Our goal was to save money, stockpile a certain amount of groceries in case of bad weather or illness, and still eat well. The vacuum sealer, freezer, and additional storage space are three wise choices that help us save money. While these steps worked best for us, adapt our suggestions to your situation. Not everyone can or should start with these ideas first.

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