

Daily Union Article
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Title: Shop Smart

Who does the grocery shopping for your household? In the not too distant past, shopping for groceries was predominantly handled by the wife or female partner. Today's trend is different as shopping roles are changing.

According to the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), 61% of grocery shopping is done by women while 49% is handled by men. You may have noticed that these two percentages add up to more than 100%. One of the trends in grocery shopping is that men and women are sharing this responsibility more and more. How does it work at your house? Is this person completing the task because they have more time? Is it because they are more organized? Perhaps it's because they are good at sniffing out the "deals" so that your grocery bill doesn't get out of control.

If the shopper in your home doesn't have these characteristics, you are likely spending too much on your grocery bill. FMI reports that the average household spends \$109.68 on groceries every week. Households with children average over \$169 per week in groceries. If you pencil that out, it means that families with children spend an average of \$676 monthly on food at the store. Being smart with your shopping habits is an effective way to control your food dollar expenses. To be a smart shopper for groceries, you need to approach the task with a plan. Begin by setting a budget for the groceries you purchase as part of your larger household budget. In addition to the money you need for food, you want to make sure you are able to put some money in savings with every paycheck and ensure you are setting aside enough money for your rent/mortgage payment, utilities, phone, gasoline, insurance and other common household expenses.

In this article, I offer you some ideas about how to manage your food dollars so that you don't capsize your household budget.

Plan your meals. Even if you only plan the menus for your evening meals, that is better than not having a plan at all. Planning your menus in advance has benefits. First, it allows you to take inventory of what you already have on hand and avoid purchasing duplicates. Additionally, by thinking ahead with your menus, you are much less likely to buy as much from the fast food restaurants. Impulse purchasing at the drive thru costs more per serving and typically increases the fat and sodium intake for your family. Finally, buying convenience foods are more expensive than buying ingredients for preparing freshly prepared dishes.

In addition to creating a food dollar budget and menus, you should develop a list of the foods you get every week or month and keep a record of how much they typically cost. One of the marketing strategies grocery stores use is to make a big deal out of a sale price. Sometimes the price marked is a big deal, but often it is just signage trying to

get you to make the purchase. If you know the prices of the foods you typically purchase, you are better able to make informed decisions on whether or not a food's price is actually marked down. Keep this list of common foods and prices in a notebook that you take to the store with you. Write the standard list on the back pages and leave the pages in the front of the notebook for your next part of the plan.

Critical to being a smart shopper is to create a list based on your week's menu and stand firm on buying only those things that have made it on your list. The grocery stores layout and how they present the products they carry are all carefully orchestrated to get you to buy more than you plan or make impulse purchases of things you never intended to buy in the first place.

Use your standard purchases list as a guide to what you will buy. Combine that with a close review of the sales ads from the stores you prefer to shop at. Don't get carried away with shopping for the best deal. Driving across town because the mayonaise your family likes is marked down \$1 doesn't do your food dollar budget any good. It is a waste of your time, energy and gasoline to shop at several stores within the same week just to pick up their specials. Besides, some stores will match advertised prices or honor coupons from other stores.

The more time you spend in the grocery store, the more money you spend! The Food Marketing Institute estimates that shoppers spend \$2.17 per minute in the store. Therefore , the most efficient way to shop is at one nearby store that has reasonable prices. When you consistently shop at the same store, you learn their floor plan and the location of your favorite purchases. Thus, you can shop faster and save more!

Stick to your list that is based on your week's menus. Organize your list according to the store layout or by food type and department. For example, have an area to list your meats, another area for your canned foods, an area for your dairy products, etc. This will help save time in the store and keeps you from forgetting items. It can also reduce your temptation to buy foods not on the list.

On March 24, I am offering a Meal Planning and Prep 101 class to help participants put all these pieces together. To learn more about menu planning and smart shopping tips or to register for the class, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!