Article Series Nutrition All

Your guide to smarter grocery shopping

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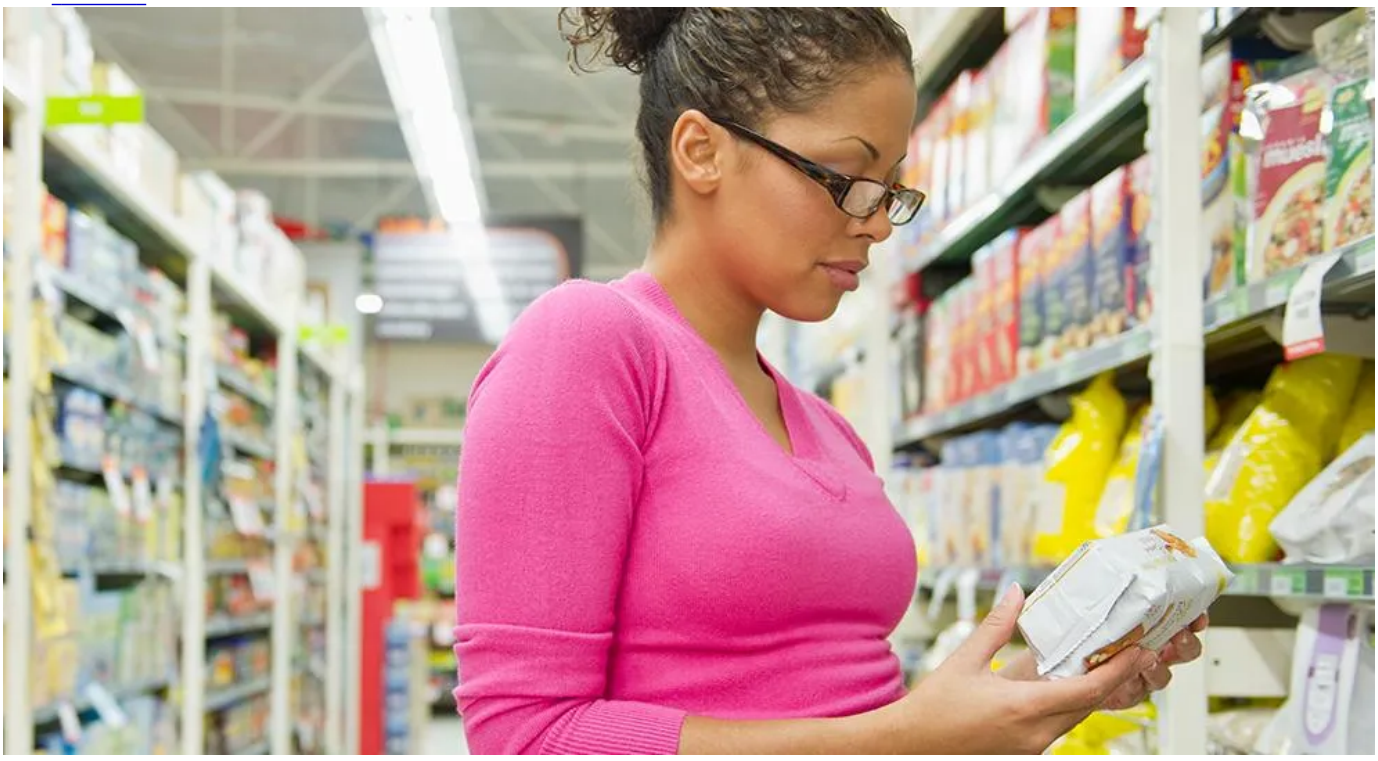

All Nutrition

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It is important to focus on nutrition during cancer treatment. One way to help yourself eat well is by being a smart shopper. Smart shopping means knowing how to pick the best available foods in the grocery store within your budget.

Choosing healthy foods

Often, healthy foods can be found along the outer aisles of the supermarket. These locations are often where you can find fresh fruits and vegetables, protein, and dairy.

- **Choose a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, proteins, and whole-grain products for a well-balanced diet.** Whole grains are more nutritious, because they contain the entire seed instead of just parts of it. Examples of whole-grain foods include brown rice, whole-wheat flour and oats
- **In general, try to limit packaged, processed foods.** If you purchase some packaged foods, it is helpful to know how to choose the best options. Often, you see words and phrases such as “natural” or “good source of” on the front of packaged foods. Food packaging is meant to entice you to buy it. It doesn’t always mean the food is healthy. This wording may grab your attention, but the best information is found on the *back* or *side* of the package. This is where you find the ingredient list and the Nutrition Facts panel

Step 1: Look at the ingredient list

Foods that are highly processed usually have a long list of ingredients, with some ingredients that are less familiar. **Processed foods often contain preservatives, added ingredients, artificial colorings, and hidden sugars.** Hidden sugars can add empty calories. These are often listed as high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, fructose, sucrose, glucose, or maple syrup. Instead, look for an ingredient list with minimal added sugar and more whole grains like whole wheat, brown rice, or whole oats.

Step 2: Look at the Nutrition Facts panel

This is where you can find serving size information. **The “Serving size” is the amount of food that is recommended to eat at one time. The “Servings per container” is the number of servings in the whole package.** For example, the “Serving size” of cereal may be ¾ cup, and there may be “About 9 servings per container.” Sticking to the serving size helps you to know you are eating the correct amount. It also helps you learn how much will fit into a healthy meal plan.

Step 3: Look at the % Daily Value

The % Daily Value listed on the right side of the Nutrition Facts panel will help you see if the item is high or low in certain nutrients. Examples of

nutrients to look for on a label are fat, cholesterol, sodium, and fiber.

- If the food contains **5% or less of the % Daily Value**, it is considered low in that nutrient
    - Choose foods that are low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, and avoid trans fat for good health
- If the food contains **20% or more of the % Daily Value**, it is considered high in that nutrient
    - Choose foods that are high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals

Planning and shopping on a budget

Smart shopping is about planning ahead. Here are some ways that you can shop smarter:

- **Planning meals ahead** of time may help you save money and avoid buying foods you don't need
- **Planning and shopping** for your meals ahead of time will also help on days when you are feeling tired
- **Making a list** of what you need to buy is helpful. Organize your list by grocery store section so it is easy to follow (for example, refrigerated section, produce, dry goods, etc.)

Useful money-saving tips

- **Budget-friendly foods include oats, potatoes, frozen mixed vegetables, and bulk bags of dried beans, whole grains, nuts, and seeds.** When frozen foods or meats are on sale, you can buy packages to stock up at a lower cost and store in the freezer to use later
- **Instead of buying all fresh food, consider a mix of fresh, frozen and canned.** Frozen is a good alternative to fresh. If you need to purchase canned vegetables, look for cans that have only one ingredient (the vegetable) and are labeled "low sodium" or "no salt added." Canned fruits should be labeled as "in water" or "in 100% juice." Canned foods should not have added ingredients or sauces that can increase sodium, making them less healthy

Budget-friendly recipe ideas

You can make tasty, well-balanced meals with a variety of budget-friendly foods. You can also change recipes to take out less healthy ingredients that are high in fat,

refined carbohydrates such as sugar and white flour, or sodium. Here are some examples:

- **Substitute lean ground chicken or turkey for beef:** You can substitute 90% lean ground chicken or turkey for ground beef in recipes. This will lower the fat content. Make your own chicken or turkey meatballs or patties instead of buying pre-made ones, which may be more expensive
- **Substitute dried or canned beans for half or all of the meat in a recipe:** This works well with soups and chilis. Dried beans are a good source of protein and are very high in fiber. Dietary fiber can help manage constipation but may need to be limited with diarrhea
- **Substitute rolled oats or wheat bran for breadcrumbs:** This adds more dietary fiber
- **Substitute non- or low-fat options for full-fat dairy or cheese:** Examples include part-skim ricotta and low-fat yogurt or cheese
- **Replace refined grains with whole grains:** It is healthy to replace refined grains, such as white rice or white flour, with whole grains, such as brown rice or whole-wheat flour, in recipes. Whole grains are a good source of dietary fiber
- **Replace salt with other flavorful ingredients:** Some examples are fresh lemon juice and fresh or dried herbs
- **Replace juices with unsweetened, low-fat beverages:** Unsweetened non-dairy milks, dairy milk, or plain coconut water can be used in place of fruit juices in recipes that call for fruit juice, such as smoothies

Checklist for shopping smart

Use the handy checklist below to stay on track with shopping smart during your cancer treatment.

MY SMART SHOPPING CHECKLIST
¨ When buying packaged foods, review the ingredient list. Choose items with ingredients that you recognize and that limit preservatives and hidden sugar.
¨ Review the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods. To choose healthier packaged foods, use the % Daily Value guidelines to compare one product with another.

¨ Make a weekly meal plan and grocery list. Keep grocery store sales in mind as you shop.
¨ Make healthy substitutions when cooking, to include more healthy foods.

This article has general information and is not meant to replace nutritional or health guidance that is specific to any individual. Speak to your healthcare provider before making any changes to your diet or lifestyle. Consult with a registered dietitian if you are on a restricted or modified diet.