

Goodbye Junk Food, Hello Smart Food Choices

(ARA) - Buying nutritious foods for yourself and your family can be difficult. We are all familiar with the food pyramid, but once in the grocery store, the incredible amount of options is overwhelming. How do you know what is best and how can you be sure to make the healthiest food choices?

Here are the top strategies for shopping smart at the grocery store:

* Plan, plan, plan.

Planning is key for nutritious shopping. First, plan to eat before you go to the store. When you're not hungry you'll be less enticed to buy snacks and other foods you really don't need. Second, make a shopping list of the meals you want to make throughout the week. By thinking ahead, you can incorporate healthy foods and you'll avoid buying prepackaged, often high-fat and high-sodium dinners. Finally, have a shopping budget. For example, allot \$200 to feed your family for the next two weeks. This will help you avoid going overboard with unnecessary treats.

* Shop the perimeter.

The perimeter of the grocery store usually holds the most nutritious items like fresh produce and meat. The majority of your budget should be allocated to foods located on the perimeter. When shopping for fruits and vegetables, choose a variety of colors. Different colors equal different vitamins and minerals so a colorful selection is best. When choosing meats, lean cuts and skinless poultry are healthier choices. And don't forget about fish -- a great source of healthy omega-3 fats.



* Let your grocery store help you.

Let's face it, nutrition labels can be confusing. Food Lion and Bloom grocery stores, located in the southeast and mid-Atlantic states, have implemented the Guiding Stars nutrition navigation program. Developed by independent scientific experts, foods are assigned one-, two-, or three-star values based on their nutritional content, with three stars being the best. The system follows a specific algorithm and is the first of its kind in the United States. So the next time you're at your local Food Lion or Bloom store, or you visit one while traveling, you can simply look on the unit price tag located on the shelf for the star rating. Shopping nutritiously has never been easier.

* Know what to look for in processed foods.

Although you might stock your cart with a lot of fresh produce, meats and dairy items, you will inevitably buy some type of processed foods. This doesn't have to be a bad thing as long as you know what to look for. For example, when buying cereal and pastas, look for whole-grain options. Items with long lists of ingredients you can't pronounce should generally be avoided.

Foods that are labeled 100 percent juice or 100 percent whole grains are better choices. Chips and other snacks should not contain unhealthy trans fats, which you'll find listed in the nutrition label. Finally, a little indulgence is fine, but look at the serving size on your favorite treats. That morning beverage you enjoy on the way to work might really be three servings, or you might be eating four servings during your afternoon snack fix.

By following these strategies, you'll be on your way to healthier shopping and better nutrition in no time. For more information visit www.GuidingStars.com.

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