



*The  
Quick & Easy*

# **Grocery Shopping Guide**

*Make trips to the  
grocery store a cinch*

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*By Dr. Julie Wei*

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## **A Note from Julie:**

### **Thanks for joining *A Healthier Wei!***

Food and nutrition is the basis of good health, but oftentimes as busy parents the last thing we feel like doing is grocery shopping. Perhaps you've grown tired of the options, feel stuck in a rut, or see it as a chore. I also know that sometimes it's difficult to navigate the grocery store because of the sheer volume of products available to us. How do we choose the items that are right for ourselves and our families?

My aim with this shopping guide is to provide easy and clear tips and ideas for you to follow so that you can discriminate between what should go in your cart and what should most definitely stay out of it. Scan it before you head to the grocery store, or print it out and take it with you! I hope you feel energized to hit the shops and pack your cart with healthier, tastier options.



*Julie*

**Dr. Julie Wei, MD.**



## ***Top 11 Grocery Shopping Rules to Remember***

### **1 Make a list and stick to it!**

Making a list avoids buying unnecessary, impulse items. Stick with the list as much as possible - supermarkets put chips and ice cream in tempting places so we often throw them in at the last minute, and often unconsciously. Making a list also means you won't miss the ingredients you need for your meal plans that week.

### **2 Never shop hungry.**

Don't go shopping when you haven't eaten all day. This is a recipe for disaster (excuse the pun!) Eating when you're satiated means you'll make better, healthier choices and fewer impulsive junk purchases.

### **3 Save \$ by buying generic brands.**

Often you are just paying for the label and their high advertising costs, so save money by buying the generic brand of something whenever it does not matter. An easy way to know is to check the ingredients on the labels of the brand and no brand version. Oftentimes they will almost be the same.

### **4 Take advantage of what's on sale.**

Always consider what is on "sale" that week. Most supermarkets these days have an email newsletter that will alert you about discounts, and also a reduced



section where you can pick up bargain produce and more.

## **5 Shop the periphery.**

When shopping, aim to pick the majority of your items from the periphery of the store. This is always where the fresh and perishable items are, including fresh produce, fruit, dairy, eggs, artisan breads, cheese, as well as items which require refrigeration - and these should make up the majority of your shopping cart. After you've filled your cart with these items, then you can duck into some of the aisles for cans and select other products.

**6 Beware, just because something is in a refrigerated section or in the periphery of a store does not mean it's healthy.** I now see an entire refrigerator section for lemonade and sweetened ice tea next to the produce isle! Also, there are so many yogurt products, pudding, Jell-O, and other refrigerated products full of sugar and/or high corn fructose syrup. Processed meats (hot dogs) & cold cuts, snacks, and any beverages/juices, are still processed and likely to contain high sugar, fat, and/or salt. The key is to ALWAYS read the food label of anything other than fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and fish. See point #7.

## **7 Learn to read your food labels.**

If you're not familiar with what the information on food labels means, take the time to learn. Reading how much sugar, saturated and trans fat, salt (sodium), and other nutrients per serving will make you more aware of what you are buying for your children and family. It's also good to understand what one serving is, as many food labels are misleading (a bottle of soda has 2-2.5



servings in it for example). Reading your labels consistently will lead to more informed choices and better purchasing habits.

## **8 Always keep “staples” in the house.**

Some of my staples are white and brown rice, pasta, grains, (cereals), olive oil, soy milk and eggs. Having these at hand means I’m less likely to order take out or head to a restaurant when I’m tired or haven’t had time to do a full grocery shop. With some pesto I can whip up a simple meal in minutes.

## **9 Keep packaged food purchases to a minimum.**

We all need snack food in the house, but often it’s a case of “if it’s there, we’ll eat it.” Avoid snacking mindlessly on junk food by limiting packaged food, and keeping snackable items to fruits, nuts, and more healthier options.

## **10 Educate Your Little Ones!**

Educating our children about food and where it comes from is really important and can lead to healthier habits that last a lifetime. Take your children shopping with you sometime when you have the time to talk to them and engage them in helping to select fruit and produce. Many children do not know what various vegetables and fruits are, and becoming familiar with fresh foods is an important first step in children growing up to incorporate them into their diet as well as learning to prepare them.

Teaching your child how to pick what looks fresh as well as how to look at expiration dates can be a useful and fun activity, too.



## **11      Don't buy anything with High Fructose Corn Syrup in it.**

This sweeter, cheaper alternative to sugar creeps into too many of our foods. Check soda labels, bread, and anything sweet for this processed ingredient that is thought to contribute to obesity, heart disease, fatty liver, and diabetes. As Dr. Mark Hyman says, "Purging it from your diet is the single best thing you can do for your health!" Follow my lead and purge your kitchen and then have a blanket rule not to allow it in the house again. You can't control whether it's in your restaurant food or ice cream cone, but you do have 100% control of it in your own home, and that's a great first step.

### ***What to buy in each section of the supermarket***

#### **The Produce Section**

**An apple a day...** Apples are truly the wonder fruit. Apples provide crunch (which makes for a satisfying snack), lots of fiber (which makes them filling), and they are super easy to eat - just wash and go!

**Get adventurous** - Take the time to learn about fruits and vegetables which you are not familiar with or did not grow up eating. You can go online and read about them, their nutrition content, and search recipes using these ingredients. Heading to an Asian supermarket, if there is one in your area, can be a really exciting way to expand your fruit and vegetable knowledge and intake. What a fun family activity, too!



**Always look at the expiration date** on fruit and vegetables to get the most time out of your investment in fresh foods. There's nothing worse than having to throw away moldy fruit! :(

**Pick a variety of colors of vegetables and fruits.** Generally, the more colorful your diet is, the more nutrients and antioxidants you are getting (apart from artificial coloring of course!)

**Sweet potatoes are a super food** that can be used to replace white potatoes in many recipes. Try making your favorite potato salad with sweet potato or yam instead, and you'll see what I mean. They are far more nutritious than white potatoes, and delicious baked by themselves with just a small dollop of sour cream and some chives. Yum.

### **Refrigerated Section - Prepared Meats**

Choose meat with less sodium and fat, and aim to eat more white meat and fish than red meat.

Choose organic and hormone-free where possible.

If you and your family like cold cuts, try saving money on sodas, high sugar beverages, and juice boxes, and instead use that money to buy the deli counter cold cuts. Brands such as Boar's Head are of far higher quality than the inexpensive prepackaged cold cuts which may also be higher in salt and fat. If your supermarket has a deli counter, ask the employees for samples; they will



gladly let you sample a thin slice before you buy so you can be sure the family will like it.

## **Protein Sources**

Aside from meat, consider other protein source like soybean product (tofu), beans, and some dairy to vary your protein intake. When buying tofu products, try to buy organic as it is less processed and not genetically modified unlike much of the soy in the USA.

## **The Cereal Aisle**

Reading and comparing food labels on cereal will astound you! The main things to look out for are the sugar, fiber and protein content in each box which differ greatly between products.

Look for a cereal with **a high fiber content** and **fewer ingredients** - and certainly **no artificial colors or flavoring**. Mixing a variety of cereal types from **Kashi** is a great way to enjoy cereal. Get creative, by buying a plain cereal and enhancing it with dried fruit, nuts, and banana. You can do the same with oatmeal which is a grain that will both keep you fuller for longer, and boost your immune system during the winter months.

## **The Processed / Canned Foods Aisle**





- 1 **When buying processed foods**, read the label. Avoid items which are high in sugar, fat, and sodium, and when possible choose options with more fiber.
- 2 **Try to avoid processed stuff** like pasta products, “XXX- Helper”, even canned soups due to their high sodium content. Instead, make soups from scratch and fresh ingredients.
- 3 **Avoid fruit that is in syrup** - it either contains high fructose corn syrup or too much sugar.
- 4 **Canned/Prepared Vegetables**

Consider buying frozen vegetables instead of canned vegetables. While fresh vegetables are usually the best option, having frozen vegetables in the house is a huge time saver, and if that means you eat more vegetables then that’s a good thing. Since they are frozen soon after being picked, their nutrition content is often better than canned vegetables, and for that reason, they may taste better too.

**However**, some items like diced tomatoes, tomato paste, canned beans, water chestnuts, bamboo and artichoke hearts are nutrient packed options that are better as canned vegetables. For these veggies, and others which would not be practical, available, or simply don't work as well if used as fresh ingredients in some recipes, do buy them in canned packaging. In these cases, it's preferable to choose no salt added or low-sodium options.



## **The Bread Aisle**

1 **Choose whole grain and wheat versions whenever possible.**

Experiment with a few different brands until you find something the family likes.

2 **If bread is on sale but close to its expiration date,** know that freezing bread is always a great option and can mean you pick up some bargains. Just take slices out of the freezer and toast them as needed throughout the week.

3 **Head to the bakery section!** There is a big difference between artisan bread and regular sliced bread. The bread in the bakery section is often baked to be enjoyed the same day, and so it has far fewer preservatives and chemicals in it. It's good to sometimes splurge on good bread; it tastes far yummier too.

4 **Get adventurous with your sandwich fillings!** Many things can go between two slices of bread besides PB & J and cold cuts and cheese! How about trying avocado slices, roasted red pepper hummus, and Tofurky slices? For more ideas go to [www.ahealthierwei.com](http://www.ahealthierwei.com).

## **Dairy**

1 **Yogurt** – Yogurt is a great source of protein and is good for digestion too. Greek is the best kind as it has higher protein and less sugar than the alternatives. Avoid cartoon characters which usually indicate higher sugar



levels, and always read the label for sugar content, which can often be surprisingly high in yogurt.

- 2 **Splurge on organic milk if you can afford it.** Always look for “no hormones added.”
- 3 **Get to know milk alternatives such as soy, almond, and even coconut.** Look to make sure there is Calcium and Vitamin D equivalents comparable to cow milk, and try to buy organic soy milk where possible.
- 4 **Be picky about your cheese** – avoid highly processed cheeses like Velveta, cheese sticks, and cheese slices. Go for the more natural stuff.

### **Frozen Aisle**

- 1 **Limit what you purchase here.** Occasional ice cream, pizza, & frozen vegetable purchases to keep as time savers are ok.
- 2 **Avoid pre-packaged and prepared breakfast sandwiches** and any items high in fat, salt, and calories. Again, READ FOOD LABELS.

### **Eggs/Other Refrigerated Items**

- 1 **Eggs are a healthy, good source of protein and good cholesterol.** They are inexpensive and good for many recipes. Eggs are a staple in my house!



- 2 **Pre-packaged pasta in the refrigerated section** can be great for quick meals.
- 3 **Prepared pesto is always good to have in the house** for a quick and tasty meal made with good fats. Pesto may also be found in the pasta / red sauce aisle.

### **Snack Aisle**

- 1 **Always have snacks in your pantry that provide crunch** - anything crunchy will be more satisfying.
- 2 **If you buy chips, choose lower fat and lower sodium** kettle chips. Look for chips with just a few ingredients.
- 3 **Choose Wheat Thins, Cheetos, Pretzels**, etc over potato chips.
- 4 **Try roasted, unsalted almonds** as a healthy snack.
- 5 **Popcorn is a good snack food** when it is not covered in artificial ingredients.

Remember that with all of these packaged foods, it's often what's added to the item that is dangerous, not the product itself. For example, popcorn is fine as a snack, but it's the butter, salt and artificial ingredients that make it unhealthy. Nuts are a great snack food, but not if they are covered in sugar and salt. So try to buy raw ingredients where possible, and if you must flavor them, do so



yourself at home where you can be in control of what you are adding to your food.

## ***Conclusion***

The more consciously you shop, the easier it will be each time to make better, healthier choices. Reading food labels will become faster, and shopping the periphery will become second-nature. Soon, you may even begin to enjoy your trips to the grocery store!

And remember, the aim here is not to deprive yourself or eat only super healthy foods, but to follow the 80/20 rule of fresh and healthy where possible, and everything in moderation. Enjoy!

## ***Stay in touch with Dr. Julie and A Healthier Wei -***

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