

you don't have to figure
it all out on your own

DR. JULIE WEI
SHOPPING GUIDE

A NOTE FROM DR. JULIE WEI

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.

Sincerely,

Dr. Julie Wei, MD



TOP 12 GROCERY SHOPPING RULES TO REMEMBER

1. Make a list and stick to it

Making a list avoids buying unnecessary, less healthy items. Making a list means you won't forget the ingredients needed for the meals you plan to make next week.

2. Never shop hungry

Don't go shopping when you haven't eaten all day, you will likely make less healthy choices. Going shopping when you're not hungry means you'll make smarter, better and healthier choices, and fewer impulsive buys that may taste great, but aren't so good for you and the kids.

3. Save money by buying generic brands

Like all products, we are often paying for the pretty packaging and marketing costs for name brands. You can save money by buying the generic brand of products if it doesn't matter to you. If you are not sure whether the name brand is really better and worth paying extra for, check the ingredients on the labels of both items to see if there is a difference.

4. Don't save money on items that matter

We don't drink dairy milk, but when my daughter was a toddler and I did buy it, I made sure it was hormone-free and organic. When buying sauce for my spaghetti/Bolognese sauce, I only buy ones that list the first ingredient as "Italian plum tomatoes" and never "tomato puree."

5. Take advantage of what's on sale

Especially in the produce and fruit section, but beware of BOGO (buy one get one free). Don't buy something just because it's BOGO. If it's bad for your health, getting the second one for free just means you are less healthy. Be careful, as the most common items on sale are usually processed foods. I look for BOGO for common items we need every week, like coffee or almond milk, and I choose fresh fruit based on what's on "sale."

6. Spend most of your time in the produce/fresh fruit section

I used to recommend shopping in the periphery of the store because that's where produce, fruit, bakery, fish, meat and refrigerated sections are. Be sure to buy fresh stuff that will actually go bad in a few days or one week. Fresh vegetables, fruit, high quality cheeses, whole grain breads and soy products like tofu, can all make up the majority of your shopping cart.

7. Beware of refrigerated items

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 iced tea next to the produce aisle! 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.

8. Learn to read the nutrition fact 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 is in each 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 because 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.

9. Always keep "staples" in the house

Some of my staples are white and brown rice, pasta, grains (cereals), olive oil, soy milk and eggs, prepared pesto, and as always, a variety of produce like fresh spinach, frozen peas, broccoli and green beans. With some prepared pesto I can whip up a simple pasta dish in minutes.

10. Keep packaged food purchases to a minimum

We all need snacks 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 foods, snacks that are high in sugar and snacks high in saturated fats. Try to have some nuts (if no nut allergy), crackers and more healthier options. (I do admit I have a Cheetos addiction, so I rarely buy them as I will likely eat half a bag at a time).

11. 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 (even adults), do not know what the many types of vegetables and fruits are! Becoming familiar with fresh foods is an important first step because if you don't know it, you won't eat it. Teaching your child how to pick fruits, vegetables, and how to look at expiration dates can be a useful and fun activity.

12. 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 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, and usually **MUCH CHEAPER!** What a fun family activity, too!
- Pick a variety of colors of vegetables and fruits. 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, higher in fiber, and delicious baked or made as mashed potatoes.

The 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 when 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, sugar, 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 sources, like soybean product (tofu), chickpeas, 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.
- 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 plain cereal and enhancing it with dried fruit, nuts and banana. You can do the same with oatmeal (steel cut is better than instant), which is a grain that will both keep you fuller longer and boost your immune system during the winter months.

The Processed/Canned Foods Aisle

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

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 that 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

- Choose whole grain and wheat versions whenever possible. Experiment with a few different brands until you find something the family likes.
- 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.
- 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 yummiier, too.
- 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?

The Dairy Aisle

- 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 or items marketed or labeled “FOR KIDS” which usually indicates higher sugar levels. Read the label for sugar content, and don’t be fooled by the “organic” and pretty image of a chunky Caucasian baby on the package, implying health,

as products may have a high sugar content. Oh, please don't bother with the yogurt that comes with candy you can mix, or a bunch of other "toppings" like crushed chocolate crème cookies!

- Splurge on organic milk if you can afford it. Always look for "no hormones added."
- 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.
- Be picky about your cheese. Avoid highly processed cheeses like Velveta, cheese sticks and cheese slices. Go for the more natural stuff.

The Frozen Aisle

- Limit what you purchase here. Occasional ice cream, pizza and frozen vegetable purchases to keep as time savers are of course OK as long as it's not the routine meal for your kids and family
- Avoid prepackaged and prepared breakfast sandwiches, and any items high in fat, salt and calories. Again, **READ FOOD LABELS**.

Eggs/Other Refrigerated Items

- 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!
- Prepackaged pasta in the refrigerated section can be great for quick meals. Tortellini, ravioli and pasta are options, but some have high fat so take a look at the labels. Gnocchi comes dry and unrefrigerated and is a great alternative as a main dish.
- 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.

The Snack Aisle

- Always have snacks in your pantry that provide crunch—anything crunchy will be more satisfying.
- If you buy chips, choose lower fat and lower sodium Kettle chips. Look for chips with just a few ingredients. Today there are endless higher quality chips and a variety of flavors that are great with dips and hummus.
- Choose Wheat Thins, pretzels and crackers over high fat potato chips.
- Try roasted, unsalted almonds as a healthy snack.
- 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. 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 the nutrition fact labels will become faster and a natural part of your shopping trip. Loitering in the fresh produce and fruit section means you are doing great. 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

The Healthy Kids Movement

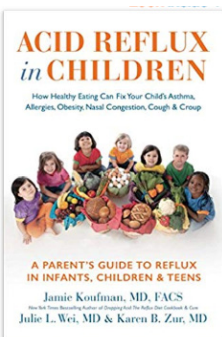
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