

## 5 Money saving tips for Grocery Shopping

1. Build a Grocery Store Data Base- Grocery stores “secret shop” one another and set their prices accordingly. Keep a running list of the products you buy most frequently, and the prices that you pay for those items at different stores. The goal is to record the products and their price so you can translate the price to a per unit cost that is comparable across all the stores, (i.e., cost per pound). By keeping a grocery data base, you will have a better sense for the typical pricing on the items you buy most, a when those items really are a bargain. Don’t make yourself crazy trying to get the best price on every item. You will wind up spending more time and money on gas than the few dollars that you think your saving by driving all over town. Instead use the 80/20 rule. Focus on the 20% of items you buy most that drive 80% of your grocery budget. This means that you spend 80% of your grocery money on 20% of the items you buy. Think meat, produce, cleaning and paper products.
2. Understand the store setup- Grocery stores are set up to encourage you to buy more. Product placement is huge. Specific items are placed at eye level and in displays to catch your attention. Brands spend a lot of money on packaging and labels. Be aware of this when you are shopping. Shop the perimeter of the store, where you will find the fresh produce, meat and dairy, the middle of the store is mostly processed food. Remember, the cut-up fruit and pre-made foods may look inviting, but you are paying a lot more for the convenience of not preparing the food at home.
3. Don’t go to the store without a plan- Spend a few minutes at home making a list and looking at what’s on sale before you go to the store. Base your weekly menu on whatever meats and produce are on special that week. When you go to the store your mindset will be “what’s the best deal on these items?” rather than “How do I fill the cart with enough stuff to eat this week?”
4. Don’t be afraid of store brand items- Large grocery store chains all offer their own brand of items at a notably lower cost than the big brands. A lot of these items are for the most part, identical to the “compare to” products that they mimic. A group of Consumer Reports “taste testers” found that most store brand items measure up to big brand items in taste and quality. Still not sold. A survey of professional chefs by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that when buying staples such as salt, sugar and flour, chefs were more likely to buy generic than you and I. These guys are the pros! Be sure to read labels and check nutrition facts and ingredients to ensure you are buying (essentially), the same product.
5. Get a store rewards card and use coupons- Most stores will offer rewards cards that can trim your grocery bill by 15% or more. Combine the rewards card with coupons and buying what’s on sale, and you will save serious cash. Stock your freezer and pantry when stores have big sales. Buy the family package of meat and divide it into meal size portions to freeze for future use. If a sale item is sold out, don’t be afraid to get a raincheck at the customer service desk. Another great hack is to shop online and do store pick up. This allows you to stick to your list and not be tempted to buy things you really don’t need. Another benefit is that you don’t have to spend an hour or so shopping.

As you can see, with a little planning, you can trim your grocery bill without sacrificing taste or quality. Lastly, and most importantly, never go food shopping when you are hungry!