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Supermarket Savings: Tips that Total Bucks

Are food prices getting you down? Me, too. More and more of us are looking for ways to save money shopping for groceries as we stretch the food budget further.

Here are five tips that you can use to save dollars – which can add up to big bucks. An example is given for each tip with the potential savings from “spending less” and/or “avoiding uneaten food” (and lost grocery money). (Note that prices are rounded to the nearest 50 cents and may vary by store and region.)

Keep a grocery list. Gas for an extra trip to the store easily can add a dollar or more to your grocery bill. And the less you shop, the less likely you will make an impulse purchase. Keep a grocery list where it's easily accessible, such as on the refrigerator, and remember to take it with you to the grocery store. Stick to your list for added savings, but do stay flexible if you encounter a one day special.

Savings example:

1. Gas to drive four miles for an extra trip to the store = \$1.00 – or more!
2. Impulse purchase of snack crackers at the store = an additional \$2.50.

Garbage check. We lose money whenever we toss food because it spoiled before we got around to eating it. If leftovers get the “heave ho” at your house, you're putting money in the garbage can! Make planning to avoid tossing foods a priority. Think “planned overs” instead of left overs. Consider: If wilted lettuce is a frequent occupant of your garbage can, serve more salads at the beginning of the week. If your household is small, share a head of lettuce with a friend or neighbor. If mashed potatoes get tossed because they've lingered too long in the refrigerator, make less next time. Or recycle them as potato patties, or on top of shepherd's pie within a day or two of making them. Some other ideas: Use ripe bananas in banana bread; add juice to smoothies or make popsicles; freeze leftovers as “planned overs” for another meal.

Savings example:

1. Tossing a half bag of “tired” lettuce = \$1.00.

Avoid shopping when hungry. Everything looks good on an empty stomach. And, it's all too easy to buy something to “tide us over” (like candy, chips, soda) in the car until we make it home. Eating before shopping can help you avoid impulse buys – and save you calories. If you're shopping with your children, feed them before going to the store, as well.

Savings example:

1. Buying an energy bar at the grocery store to tide you over until you get home = \$1.50 more spent.

Brown bag it. If you usually eat out at noon, consider brown bagging it at least one day a week. The typical fast food meal easily can cost \$5.00 or more. Take “planned over” food from an evening meal. Or a peanut butter or cheese sandwich and a piece of fruit (whole apple, banana, etc.) can be quickly packed from foods on hand. (Be sure to pack food for lunch in a cooler with ice packs or refrigerate as soon as you get to work.)

NOTE: You will probably save money on your children's lunch by having them participate in the school lunch program. They can eat a balanced meal offered at a reasonable price.

Savings example:

1. Eating a sack lunch one day a week = savings of \$2.50 or more.
2. Eating a sack lunch five days a week – savings of \$12.50 or more.

Check expiration dates. Avoid buying a food that is past or nearly past its prime. If it's on sale and near its expiration day and you purchase the product, use it soon.

Savings example:

1. Dumping a half gallon of soured milk down the drain = \$2.50.

Saving \$1.00 here, \$2.50 there adds up. Look for ways that you can save money when shopping for groceries and stretching the food budget.

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