



ALASKA  
PREMIER  
HEALTH

# Shopping smart

## Take Time to Shop Smart

Grocers know 50 to 80 percent of all purchasing decisions are made in the store. Shoppers are tempted by strategically placed impulse items and “manager’s specials” advertised over the public address system. These marketing strategies can turn grocery shopping into a weekly battle for people trying to manage their weight. Developing smart shopping skills will reduce the challenges you face as you make the transition to self-prepared foods. These same skills will also help you manage your weight in the long term.

One of the first steps in learning to be a smart shopper is becoming aware that supermarkets, like all businesses, are organized to make a profit. Grocers arrange their products to entice consumers to buy as many high-profit items as possible. This is why:

- Low-fat and low-profit items such as fresh poultry and meats, produce, and dairy products are typically found on the outside aisles. Grocers make only a 1 to 3 percent profit on these items.
- Packaged and canned foods are found in the center of the market. These foods typically have a long shelf life, so they are more profitable for a grocer to stock than fresh perishable items. Most canned and processed foods have undergone a significant amount of processing and, as a result, contain high levels of sugar, salt, and/or fat. Be sure to look for the healthiest versions of packaged foods such as low-fat crackers and low-fat, low-sodium soups.
- The highest profit items are usually placed at eye level. Bulk staples, specialty items—including healthful foods—and loss leaders (products that the store offers at below cost, hoping to make up its loss on high-profit impulse sales) are usually placed low where you have to bend for them or high where you have to reach for them.

## tools for success

- Use smart shopping skills like making lists and purchasing fresh vs. processed foods to minimize your intake of high-fat, high-calorie foods.
- Evaluate nutrition labeling to choose food products that support your dietary goals.
- Evaluate old shopping habits, and determine how to keep them from interfering with your attempts to develop a healthier relationship with food.
- Use select Internet-based nutrition information sites to analyze foods before you shop.

[www.OPTIFAST.com](http://www.OPTIFAST.com)



- Baked goods and “impulse” items such as cakes, candies, cookies, nuts, and chips are often prominently displayed at the ends of the aisles and at the checkout counter to encourage impulse buys and capture the 20% to 40 percent profit that goes with them.
- Expensive and highly sugared cereals are stocked at a child’s eye level because children are responsible for more than 50 percent of the cereal purchases made by their parents. It is for this reason candy is located at the checkout counter. Choose checkout lanes where candy is not being merchandised to help avoid impulse purchases of high-calorie sweets.

---

### Steps for Shopping Smart

- Plan your meals, make your shopping list, and shop when you are not hungry. This can cut down on impulsive purchases.
- Plan meals and snacks for a week at a time.
- Make a list of the specific foods you will purchase.
- Limit trips to the grocery store. By making your grocery list from your week’s menu, you can do the majority of the shopping for the week in one trip. The less frequently you enter the grocery store the less you will be tempted to buy items on impulse.
- Ask your spouse or other family member to help you create your list and shop from it (but only if this person is a “healthy choices, shop from the list” shopper).
- Keep an ongoing shopping list in your kitchen. When you notice you need something, write it down.
- Check new recipes that you plan to try to be sure you have the needed ingredients. You may never get around to trying a nutritious new recipe if you’re lacking an important ingredient.
- Make sure you have the shopping list in hand before leaving the house.
- Carry a limited amount of money or set a dollar limit to ensure that you don’t buy unnecessary items.
- Shop at full-service grocery stores so that fresh produce, grains, meats, and poultry are available. Avoid convenience stores.
- Avoid stores that offer samples, or avoid going during sampling times. Samples are often of high-fat, empty-calorie foods that are not on your list or in your food plan. If you choose to take advantage of samples, or have a snack as part of the shopping trip, review and adjust your daily meal plan to account for your snack.
- Consider adopting one store as your regular shopping place. Get to know the employees so that you’ll feel comfortable asking questions or asking them to stock specific items. Many supermarkets have a home economist or a dietitian on staff who can address specific questions.
- Purchase convenience items such as grated cheese, pre-sliced fruit, and meat prepared for stir-frying if it will help you avoid eating out or nibbling while preparing meals. Although convenience foods can be costly, it can be more economical—both financially and calorically—than eating out.
- Buy foods in bulk only if you are skilled at controlling your portion size! Buying in bulk is more economical and reduces trips to the grocery, but this practice may work against your weight management goals. It is easier to control portion size and calories if you have six small bags of baked potato chips rather than a giant economy bag of chips.



- Try “house brands.” Private label or supermarket brands often compare well with nationally advertised brands. Sometimes they’re even produced by the same manufacturer. The prices can be 5 to 50 percent less.
- Clip coupons only if you’re willing to evaluate the product carefully. Don’t be tempted to make a purchase you don’t need just to save a few cents. Use coupons when a store puts a product on sale to get an extra discount.
- Shop from a basket rather than a cart if you need only a few items. The limited space will help limit impulse buying.
- Stick to the outside aisles of the market where you will find most of your fresh “whole” foods like bread, milk, meat, and produce which don’t have a lot of added fat, sugar, or sodium.
- Shop only the aisles where you need specific items. Walking up and down every aisle can prompt you to make an impulse purchase.
- Learn to read labels. Remember that reduced-fat foods may not necessarily be low-calorie since carbohydrates often replace fat. Refer to the next section “A Consumer’s Guide to Food Labels.” Also review the information contained in “Savvy Surfing Makes for Smart Shopping” to learn more about resources that can help you interpret food labels.
- Compare the unit price and the nutritional content of items featured in a special rack or display against the price of comparable products on the regular shelves. You may find a better deal there.
- Watch out for impulse items on the ends of the aisles and at the checkout counter. Buy “empty calorie” foods in the smallest size and, if possible, in individual packages – if you buy them at all. It’s best not to bring these items home. If you don’t have them in the house, you can’t eat them!
- Review your list while at the checkout counter to make sure you have purchased all items. This will keep your eyes from wandering to the candy rack (and prevent return trips to the store).
- Save your sales receipts. Periodically review food purchases and costs. Evaluate your success in sticking to your list, making low-fat choices, and saving money.
- Store food properly and promptly upon arriving home. Avoid leaving it out on the counters where it might tempt you to start snacking.
- Consider online grocery shopping and delivery services to save time and reduce impulse purchases.

---

## A Consumer’s Guide to Food Labels

You can learn a lot by reading the labels on the foods you purchase. Reading labels will help you understand what is in a food product so that you can determine whether it is an appropriate choice for your weight management efforts. Many people say they read labels to help them avoid substances such as fat, sodium, and cholesterol, and for information on ingredients and product shelf life.

### Ingredient Labeling

- A list of ingredients is required on the label for all foods that have more than one component.
- All of the ingredients are identified by their common or usual names.
- The ingredient that is present in the largest amount, by weight, is listed first. Other ingredients are listed in descending order.
- All additives are listed.
- Flavors are listed generally as “artificial flavor” or “natural flavor” except in butter, cheese, and ice cream.
- Certified artificial colors are listed by their full common or usual name, such as FD&C Yellow No. 5.



### Nutritional Labeling

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act mandated the FDA to come up with labeling guidelines that reflect consumer interests and public health concerns (weight management, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol). Figure 1 shows an example of a current food label format.

### Product Dating

Date stamps give consumers an idea of how long a product will remain wholesome and safe after purchase. For most food, product dating is not regulated by the FDA. One notable exception is infant formula products, which by law must carry an expiration date. Common dating terms include: sell date, use by date, pull date (when the product should be pulled from the store shelf), pack date (date product was packed), freshness date, and expiration date.

### Descriptive Terms

The Nutrition Education and Labeling Act created uniform definitions for terms that describe the nutrient content of a particular food. This ensures that these terms mean the same for all products on which they are used. Terms which are defined include:

- Free – product contains no amount of, or only trivial or “physiologically inconsequential” amounts of one or more of these components: fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugars, and calories.
- Low-fat – 3 g or less per serving.
- Low saturated fat – 1 g or less per serving.
- Low sodium – 140 mg or less per serving.
- Very low sodium – 35 mg or less per serving.
- Low cholesterol – less than 20 mg of cholesterol and 2 g or less of saturated fat.
- Low calorie – 40 kcal or less per serving.
- Calorie-free – less than 5 calories per serving.
- Light – 1/3 fewer calories or 1/2 the fat of the usual food.
- Lean – less than 10 g fat, 4.5 g or less saturated fat, and 95 mg cholesterol.
- Extra lean – less than 5 g fat, 2 g saturated fat, and 95 mg cholesterol.
- High – more than 20% of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient per serving.
- Good source – 10 to 19% of the Daily Value for a particular nutrient per serving.
- Reduced – a nutritionally altered product which contains 25% less of a nutrient or calories than the regular product.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size 1 cup (240ml)	
Servings Per Container 4	
<b>Amount Per Serving</b>	
<b>Calories 120</b> Calories from Fat 45	
<b>% Daily Value*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 5g	<b>8%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>
<i>Trans</i> Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 20 mg	<b>7%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 120 mg	<b>5%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 12g	<b>4%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Sugars 12g	
<b>Protein</b> 8g	
<b>Vitamin A</b> 10%	<b>Vitamin C</b> 4%
<b>Calcium</b> 30%	<b>Iron</b> 0%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000      2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g      80g
Sat Fat	Less than 20g      25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg      300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg      2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g      375g
Dietary Fiber	25g      30g
Calories per gram:	Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Figure 1. Sample of product labeling



## Listing of Nutrients

Current food labeling regulations require vitamin and mineral information for vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron. The remainder of the mandatory components on the nutrition label provide detailed information about nutrients that are of concern to most Americans: fat (total fat, trans fat and saturated fat), cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, simple sugars, dietary fiber, and protein.

All other nutrient content information is voluntary unless a claim is made about any of the optional components, or if a food is fortified or enriched with any of them. For example, the Nutrition Fact panel for a grain product fortified with the B vitamin, folate, must indicate the amount of folate it contains.

Nutrients are reported in Daily Values, which reflect current nutritional recommendations for someone consuming a 2,000 calorie per day diet (individual calorie needs vary). For some nutrients, especially fat and saturated fat, the Daily Value is connected to the calorie level you consume. If you need less than 2,000 calories per day, your Daily Value of fats and carbohydrates will be less than that indicated for a 2,000 calorie diet. In this case, you may find it more helpful to use the information regarding the grams of these nutrients contained in a serving of the food.

## Serving Sizes

Labeling law dictates to manufacturers the amount of each type of food considered to be a realistic single portion so that serving sizes are standardized across all brands. All nutrient information on the label is based on these established serving sizes.

This has worked well in many food categories such as canned soup, where one cup is the agreed upon serving size. However, there are some categories of foods that have not fully complied with the new serving size regulations: cereal manufacturers,

for instance, have received special dispensation. One serving of puffed wheat cereal is considered to be one cup or 30 grams by weight, while 30 grams of granola takes up only 1/4 of a cup. Shredded wheat cereals, on the other hand, are measured in terms of the number of biscuits.

## One Serving or Two? The Choice is Up To You

Some manufacturers have found creative ways to package foods so the typical consumer will unwittingly purchase a multiple serving product packaged to look like a single portion. Before you buy, ask yourself how the size of the product compares to the portion you would normally eat as well as to the number of servings indicated on the label.

Here are some clever but deceptive packaging techniques:

- The front label on a 3-inch-diameter muffin reads "low-fat" in large letters suggesting it is a healthy choice. After careful reading of the very small print on the Nutrition Facts label, it is apparent that the muffin is intended to serve three people. So the "healthy" claim only applies if you consume one third of the muffin.
- The label on a moderate-sized burrito indicates it weighs 10 ounces and supplies 263 calories and 8 grams of fat. It looks like a single serving, but, in tiny print, the label indicates it is intended to serve two. If you eat the rather modest-sized burrito without reading the label, you actually consume 526 calories and 16 grams of fat.
- A rice bowl dinner that appears to be a single serving claims to supply a scant 240 calories. In truth, the bowl actually holds two servings.

Despite these shortcomings, current food labels provide a considerable amount of information such as descriptive terms, health claims, and serving sizes that consumers can use to make healthful food choices. The burden is on the consumer to learn how to interpret the food labels and to take the time to thoroughly read the labels on foods purchased.

## serving up with certainty

Be sure to check "Serving Size" and "Servings Per Container" on every label to better understand what you will be consuming.



## Commonly Misunderstood Label Terms

- **Antioxidants** – Preservatives such as BHA, BHT, and propyl gallate that prevent or delay discoloration in certain foods, such as cut potatoes and sliced apples, and keep oils and fats from turning rancid.
- **Emulsifiers** – Agents used to stabilize fat and water mixtures, such as mayonnaise, chocolate, and margarine, so they will not separate out.
- **Enriched flour** – Iron and B vitamins are added to meet levels required by the FDA.
- **Grade** – Describes the quality level of various characteristics of the product (taste, texture, appearance) or sanitary standards for producing and processing the food. Grades are not based on nutritional values.
- **Hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated** – The process of adding hydrogen to an unsaturated fat to make it saturated. The more an oil is hydrogenated, the more saturated fatty acids it contains. Fats with mostly unsaturated fatty acids are liquid at room temperature and may be monounsaturated or poly-unsaturated. Fats with a high proportion of saturated fatty acids are solid or nearly solid at room temperature and are found in larger amounts in foods of animal origin and tropical oils, like coconut, palm, and palm kernel oil.
- **Imitation** – A product that resembles a standardized food, but whose nutrient composition is different. An example is imitation whipped topping.
- **Juice** – Must be 100 percent juice. If diluted with water or other ingredients, it must be called “drink” or “beverage” and the total percentage of juice in juice drinks must be declared on the label.
- **Natural** – Appears on many products, but has little meaning.
- **Stabilizers and thickeners** – Substances such as cornstarch, gelatin, pectin, and agar that give foods a smooth, uniform texture and protect them from temperature fluctuations and physical shock during distribution.
- **Sugar-free or sugarless** – Means that no sugars – sucrose, fructose, corn syrup, or other sugars – are used. However, the product may still contain calories if other sugar alcohol sweeteners like xylitol, sorbitol, or mannitol are used. Saccharin, Acesulfame K, Aspartame (NutraSweet®) and Splenda® are non-nutritive sweeteners.
- **Food allergen labeling** – Every year, millions of Americans have allergic reactions to food. The reaction to the allergen can be severe or even life threatening. There are eight food allergens that food labels must identify by law. There are two ways to find them on the label. One option is to put the allergen next to the ingredient name in parentheses. An example would be “flour (wheat)” and “whey (milk).” The second option is to include a “contains” statement such as “contains wheat and soy.”

Eight foods required by law to be listed on food labels:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Milk                                    | 5. Tree Nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans) |
| 2. Eggs                                    | 6. Peanuts                              |
| 3. Fish (bass, cod, flounder)              | 7. Wheat                                |
| 4. Crustacean fish (crab, lobster, shrimp) | 8. Soy beans                            |