

Smart Grocery Shopping Can Improve Your Love Life (And Save You Money) **By Steve Baldwin, MS, RD**

I used to despise grocery shopping. The small parking lots, the long lines, the hassle. I avoided it like the plague. If given the choice between grocery shopping and, say, sticking needles in my eyes, it would have been a toss-up. In fact, the decision might have depended on the length of the needle.

Then something changed, and deep in the recesses of my mind a small but steady glimmer of understanding began to swell, eventually crashing on the shoreline of my conscience like a tidal wave, a simple word surfing to the forefront of my psyche that changed everything forever. I've been a happy-go-lucky-grocery-shopping-fool ever since.

The word: list.

Now you're probably thinking that I'm exaggerating for the sake of making a point, but nothing could be further from the truth. The simple act of creating a shopping list not only saved me time and money (I now purchase only what I need), but it also improved my marriage. Before, my wife would send me to the store for five items, and I'd come back with three plus a car magazine – an effort that did not garner a favorable reaction. Now I stick to my list and she's a happy camper.

I learned a few additional tricks along the way that have helped considerably. Implementing just one or two of the following tips is likely to make your significant other a whole lot happier...and you might just save a few bucks along the way.

Avoid extra shopping trips. Shop only once or twice each week. You'll spend less on "impulse" buys and save time, too.

Clip coupons, but only for items you need. Try not to justify a purchase simply because you have a coupon. Instead pull out the coupons for items your family will eat regardless. Also, check to see that the "coupon item" is a good deal – there may be another brand that's cheaper even without a coupon.

Take advantage of seasonal produce. Oranges are cheap in the winter months and pricey in the summer. The opposite is true of strawberries and melons. If you're unsure, ask your grocery store's produce manager to point out seasonal specials.

Use frozen or canned fruits and vegetables that are not in season. They often have the same nutritional quality at a better price.

Buy "economy size" only if you can use that much. Larger sizes are normally more cost effective per serving, but not if half of it goes bad before you can eat it.

If they apply to you, watch for senior citizen discount days. This goes for restaurants, too. Those who are age-gifted should take advantage.

Compare the prices of national brands and store brands. Many times, the generic brands offer substantial savings over national brands. Try generic once, and if the quality is acceptable, you can save a lot of money over time.

Buy produce that keeps longer in the refrigerator. Broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, carrots, sweet potatoes, yams, apples, grapefruit, melons, oranges and pears have a pretty good shelf life compared to other produce.

Following these tips can help ease the pain for even the most dispassionate grocery shopper. You'll save money, and have more time for the fun things like doing the dishes, folding laundry, and paying bills.

Ahhh...the joys of adulthood.

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