

Supermarket Savings

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With fuel prices rising and product sizes shrinking it will be more challenging to stick to a budget in 2011 but a smart consumer can still rack up the savings. You can start saving dollars before you even come up with a shopping list, use what you already have before buying more. Plan next week's menu around items in your pantry. Have a shopping list on the refrigerator. Add store specials to your list, plan to stock up on non-perishables that you use on a regular basis when they go on sale. Clip coupons or print them from web sites, this can save you 10% to 15% on your grocery bill. Also, think of nutritional value, cut down on expensive ready-to-eat salty and sweet snacks, and don't be tempted even if they're on sale. Now you're ready to shop. The following are ways to save at the supermarket:

- Bring your list and coupons with you and stick to your budget!
- Frozen vegetables are often less expensive than fresh and are equally nutritious. They also last longer and store easily. You can portion out what you need to avoid waste.
- Compare the unit price of similar products. A unit price tells you how much the food costs per ounce. This habit is a money saver, especially now as Consumer Reports Magazine has just published that manufacturers are shaving ounces and inches from their packages, some as much as 20 percent.
- Store brands are comparable in nutrition to name brands, many are from the same processors as the national brands and the savings can really add up.
- Think your drink, limit soda's and don't waste your money on fruit drinks that aren't 100% real fruit.
- Follow portions for protein: You can still keep your costs low when shopping in the meat section. Remember a 3-ounce portion of cooked meat, fish or poultry is the size of a deck of cards.
- Read the label, look for items packed with nutrition at a low price like beans (black beans, kidney beans, chick peas) can tuna and salmon, and store brand whole grain cereals.
- Be alert and aware at check-out. Mistakes happen!

Visit the customer service desk to find out cost saving policies at your favorite store. Some stores will match other store's sale prices. For more ways to save go to The University of Florida/IFAS publication, "Managing in Tough Times" at <http://fyys.ifas.ufl.edu/toughtimes/>.