

# Supermarket Savvy

*by Linda Fiverson*

In a troubled economy, many Americans are trying hard to make ends meet. We are faced with increasing costs and decreasing abilities to pay them. This includes the price of food and threatens to affect our health and wellbeing. At the same time news reports continue to tell us that the incidence of obesity is growing at dangerous rates and we're encouraged to address the challenge. The question many people are asking is, "How"? Indeed how can we plan healthy meals and develop healthy eating habits when the price of food is so high?

Perhaps this is a good time to think about your food purchases. Do you spend more than you should? Are you compromising what you eat in order to spend less? How can you spend your money wisely and eat a nutritionally sound diet?

The first thing you need to do is become "supermarket savvy". That means taking a good look at the way you shop now and making amends where needed. You'll be surprised at how easy it is to do this!

**BEFORE YOU GO TO THE STORE** it's a good idea to survey your pantry and fridge. We often have items and ingredients we forgot all about. These may trigger recipe ideas in your head and help you generate a shopping list. Some of them may be able to be used as a substitute for something else. Write down items you need to buy on your list and eliminate any you don't absolutely have to have! Check grocery ads before you go too. Compare the flyers from a few stores as they usually advertise different sale items and you'll want to go where you'll get the most for your money. Clipping coupons is another great money saver, especially if you can combine it with a sale or use it in a store that doubles or triples its value. Be "supermarket savvy" however – coupons are only valuable if they are for items you need.

Last night's dinner can be tomorrow night's soup. Be creative and use leftovers for other meals. By shredding leftover meat or turkey you can add it into a taco mixture or chop it and use it in a pot pie. Work on recipes that feed whole families; one-pot meals such as chili and soups are usually most cost effective.

**WHEN YOU GET TO THE STORE** be committed to following the list you prepared. If you're organized you'll be much more efficient. You'll be able to find what you're looking for and be less apt to become distracted. I have always counseled others to read labels for ingredients. The less ingredients a product has, the healthier it generally is. The first five ingredients are the most important ones and they're listed in declining order with the larger amounts, first. It's important to read other labels too. You might be inclined to select a lower priced item but if you check the cost per serving You might note that the lower priced item has less servings and isn't really a better deal. Unit prices tell how much food costs per ounce or pound.

Supermarket planners are smart. They want to make profits and they're not thinking about me or you. They put higher priced items at eye level and place less costly ones on higher and lower shelves, requiring us to bend or stretch to see them. Knowing this helps train us to look for our options. By preparing shopping lists and a weekly menu, we should only have to go to the supermarket once a week. The more often we go, the

more money we spend. Market research indicates that the longer you spend in a store, the more money you spend. That makes sense, doesn't it? So plan wisely and you'll spend wisely! Sticking to your list helps eliminate making impulse purchases. You'll find if you shop when you aren't hungry you'll save money too because you'll be less likely to splurge on something you feel like you just have to have NOW!

The healthiest foods are on the periphery of the store meaning in the refrigerator sections. If you have a choice, select fresh produce for your family. Sometimes a particular fruit or vegetable is too highly priced and not a wise choice. A good second option is to see if it's available in a frozen form.

Watching TV has accustomed us to desire specific national brands. We allow ourselves to become brainwashed that these are the best selections. However, the reality is that many store brands are of the same quality while being much more reasonably priced. This is definitely something to consider.

**OTHER HELPFUL HINTS** include shopping alone. If you shop with your spouse, children or even a friend, they might try to influence you to purchase things that entice them while you're there. Once we get involved in buying unplanned items, we start spending money we would have liked to reserve. If the sale price on a particular item is really attractive, it isn't perishable and is something you have a lot of use for consider buying enough for another time. The goal is to get the most food for the least amount of money possible.

**BACK HOME** stay devoted to your new habits. Continue to look for novel recipes and ways to recycle foods and ingredients you already have. Educate your family about the pluses of eating healthy and making smart and savvy food choices at no increased cost to their wallet or their health. Being "supermarket savvy" is definitely a good place to start!