Grocery Shopping 101

Breanne Nalder Harward, MS, RDN

No matter how you shop — in the store or online — the basics of healthful eating remain the same. At the supermarket, shop for healthful ingredients based on foods from the 5 essentials: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-to-no-fat dairy foods (or dairy alternatives of course!). Use the tips below to maximize nutrition choices throughout the aisles. Make your focus to shop in COLOR and start at the perimeter of the store first, so you fill your cart with fresh foods before hitting the aisles and being tempted by processed foods ☺

Fruits and Vegetables

- Choose multiple colors of fresh produce to get a variety of nutrients.
- Stock up on frozen, jarred, and dried options. Choose plain frozen vegetables and reduced-sodium or no-added-salt versions of canned vegetables. Look for unsweetened fruits, or types packed in their own juice or water. Choose dried fruits without added sugars.

Whole Grains

- Choose mostly whole-grain versions of foods like bread, cereal, rice, and pasta. Examples are 100% whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, brown rice, and explore all of the pasta options out there!
- Enjoy “ancient grains” like quinoa, amaranth, and millet. These examples are whole grains, variety is a good thing!

Protein

- Choose lean meats — look for cuts with “loin” or “round” in the name to minimize saturated fat.
- Buy skinless poultry or remove the skin before or after cooking.
- Choose fatty fish such salmon, Atlantic or Pacific mackerel, tuna, and sardines for their heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Find them fresh, frozen, canned, or in pouches. Opt for “wild caught” brands.
- Try plant proteins like nuts and seeds, nuts, nut butters, beans (kidney, black, pinto, garbanzo, and more), peas and lentils to liven up any dish.
- Buy economical bags of dry beans to make from scratch. For convenience, stock up on reduced-sodium canned beans, or rinse regular beans under cold water to reduce sodium.
- Experiment with soy proteins like edamame (green soybeans), tofu (soybean cake), and tempeh (fermented soybean cake that may also contain grains).

Dairy and Alternatives

- Select low-fat and fat-free versions of milk, yogurt, and cheese. Or better yet, the plant-based milk alternatives will eliminate cholesterol entirely.
- Compare added sugar on labels and choose those with lower amounts or the label “unsweetened.”
- Almond, oat, cashew, soy, coconut, etc. milk alternatives are all great choices. Change it up and try different milks with your smoothies, cereals, even baked goods!

Oils and Fats

- Choose liquid vegetable oils like olive, canola, corn, cottonseed safflower, soybean, or sunflower oil. Oils contain less saturated fat than solid fats like butter and lard. Vegan versions are a great choice too.

The Scoop on 10 Popular Pantry Staples

1. **Oats.** Oats provide iron and B vitamins, and contain soluble fiber, which may help lower blood cholesterol. Oatmeal makes a satisfying breakfast, but you can also enjoy oats in smoothies, cookies, pancakes, and homemade granola and snack bars.
2. **Ready-to-eat cereals.** Choose a cereal that lists a whole grain as the first ingredient. Compare the Nutrition Facts label on different brands to find options with at least 3 grams of dietary fiber and the fewest grams of added sugars per serving.
3. **Whole grains.** Nutty-tasting brown rice is a whole-grain food that offers dietary fiber, protein, and B vitamins. Use it as a side dish and in salads, soups, and stuffing. Use other whole grains, such as quinoa, millet, and amaranth, in most recipes that call for rice.
4. **Pasta.** Look for options made from whole wheat, brown rice, quinoa, or other whole grains, as they are higher in dietary fiber and protein than enriched pasta. Explore chick pea, lentil, and even potato pastas!
5. **Beans and lentils.** Dried and canned beans and lentils provide dietary fiber, protein, and B vitamins. Stock a variety such as black, pinto, kidney, and white beans, and brown, green, and red lentils. Add them to salads, soups, chili, salsa, casseroles, and pasta.
6. **Tuna, salmon, and sardines** (cans or pouches). Packed with protein and heart-healthy omega-3 fats, use tuna, salmon, and sardines in salads, sandwich fillings, or for a snack on crackers.
7. **Canned tomatoes.** Tasty canned tomatoes add vitamin C and the antioxidant lycopene to a variety of dishes. Use whole or crushed tomatoes for sauces and soups. Choose diced tomatoes for bruschetta, salsa, or guacamole.
8. **Stocks and broths** (unsalted or low sodium). Add flavor to soups, sauces, rice, and pastas with vegetable and bone broths. They also are a great way to add protein and other nutrients to the mix!
9. **Condiments.** Mustard adds creaminess and zesty flavor to salad dressings, sauces, marinades, and dips. Liquid Aminos, vegan mayo, nutritional yeast, unsweetened ketchup, etc. all can spice up your meals!
10. **Cooking oils.** Keep a variety of oils for different purposes. Use a fruity olive oil in salad dressings and neutral-flavored canola oil in baked goods. Drizzle toasted sesame oil onto stir-fried vegetables. Avocado oil is great on vegetables. Beware of coconut oil, as it is the one plant oil that is high in saturated fats.

Stocking a Healthy Pantry

- Beans, peas, and lentils (dry or reduced-sodium canned)
- Peanut butter, nut butters
- Pasta sauce (reduced sodium)
- Cans or pouches of seafood (such as tuna, salmon, and sardines)
- Canned vegetables (reduced sodium or no added salt)
- Canned soup (reduced sodium)
- Canned tomato products (such as whole, diced, and crushed; reduced sodium or no added salt)
- Crackers (rice, casava flour, nut and seed based) in place of chips
- Jars of roasted red peppers, artichoke hearts, and olives
- Dried fruit (without added sugar)
- Whole-grain ready-to-eat cereals (such as oatmeal whole-wheat flakes)
- Whole grains (such as brown rice, barley, bulgur, farro, quinoa, buckwheat, amaranth, millet, and sorghum)
- Whole-grain pasta (such as spaghetti, rigatoni, and shells)
- Popcorn (kernels or “light” pre-popped)
- Nuts and seeds (almonds, cashews, walnuts, nut butters, chia, flax, and hemp seeds)

Take the next step and make your grocery list based on a meal plan specific to your needs and goals. For help determining your calorie, macro- and micro- nutrient needs, and how to apply those into your personal meal plan, contact me to schedule an appointment!