

THE NASM GUIDE TO

# SMART GROCERY SHOPPING CHOICES FOR OPTIMAL NUTRITION

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#### Disclaimer

The content in this guide is intended to be used for informational purposes only. It is not to be used to diagnose or treat any medical condition or disease, and not to replace guidance from a licensed healthcare provider.

### Welcome!

Welcome to this comprehensive guide to Smart Grocery Shopping Choices for Optimal Nutrition. If you've picked up this guide, chances are that you find grocery shopping challenging or frustrating, or you are interested in streamlining your current practices to better suit your goals or improve your nutritional intake. Many people find grocery shopping to be overwhelming, and this guide is designed to simplify the process and help you make intentional purchases that support your health and fitness goals. Good nutrition is based on having an adequate amount and variety of nutrient-dense foods in your diet, and this starts with making appropriate choices when purchasing food. However, given the variety of products available in our food industry, it is not always easy to figure out what to buy to make

healthy meals, or how to evaluate and compare products and pick those that best support our needs.

By the end of this guide, you should have answers to your questions about grocery shopping, and you will feel more confident in selecting and comparing products based on your goals. We've included sample grocery lists, meal planning guides, and checklists to evaluate products, as well as a summary of how to read a nutrition label, key nutrients to look at, and more. We hope you enjoy reviewing the guide and use all of the accompanying resources in planning your next set of meals grocery trip.



#### About NASM

The National Academy of Sports Medicine is the leader in educating and credentialing fitness, wellness, and performance professionals across the globe. We provide valid, up-to-date content on topics that improve the health and well-being of those they serve. We pride ourselves on creating practical content you can apply right away. Learn more about us at <a href="https://www.nasm.org">www.nasm.org</a>, your favorite social media platform, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

# Getting the Most from This Guide

This guide to Smart Grocery Choices for Optimal Nutrition is designed to be a tool that helps you streamline and optimize your grocery purchases to support your health and nutrition goals. The guide walks you through key areas to focus on when grocery shopping, from determining what to buy to evaluating the nutrient content of your purchases and ensuring that your choices are adequate and balanced to support your needs and dietary preferences. We'll simplify the process of grocery shopping for optimal health and give you some key takeaways and actionable steps to implement when you head out for your next grocery trip!

Come back and use the information in this guide as a reference at any time and use the key takeaways and application strategies in whatever way makes sense for you and your goals. In addition, don't feel obligated to put everything into action right away. When you are ready for a deeper dive into the topic of optimal nutrition and health, check out our recommended resources.



#### Introduction

One of the most basic needs of humankind is the need for food. It provides us with energy for all kinds of disease prevention and physiological needs, such as growth, repair of muscles and tissues, and respiration, as well as the nutrients that support these processes (Pecora et al., 2020). Our choice of foods affects our energy intake and the quality and adequacy of the nutrients we consume. If we consume energy-dense foods that are high in calories beyond our energy needs, then we are likely to gain weight. Inadequate intake might lead to undesirable weight loss, such as in highly active individuals. In addition, an imbalanced intake of foods and food groups can contribute to nutrient imbalances in vitamins and minerals, which affect our health and energy levels. Moreover, what we choose to eat at home is usually influenced by the choices we make at the grocery store (Appelhans et al., 2017). If we make nutritious choices when purchasing food, we create a healthier dietary environment for ourselves at home and are more likely to consume nutrient -dense options. Conversely, if we primarily select low-nutrient or high calorie products, such as soda or sweets, then we are much more likely

to consume these on a regular basis, which is not usually ideal for optimal health (Juul et al., 2015; Canella et al., 2014).

Selecting healthy foods, however, is not always easy in our current environment given the immense variety of food products available. How many times have we gone to the grocery store and been overwhelmed with the variety of cereal, crackers, pasta sauces, and soup brands? How do you decide what brands to buy, and which are more nutritious than others? How many of us have also struggled with knowing what to buy at the grocery store to put healthy meals together? How many of us have gone to the grocery store and come home with items that you didn't mean to purchase, or impulse buys that are now enticing you at snack time? If any of these scenarios sound familiar, then you will find this guide extremely useful. You will not only learn how to organize your meals and grocery shopping, but streamline your grocery list, and efficiently evaluate and compare products for your health and nutrition needs and goals.



# Healthy Grocery Shopping Challenges

Many people find grocery shopping to be enjoyable; they enjoy selecting ingredients and fresh produce and crafting recipes and meals at home. However, it can be an overwhelming and stressful experience if you are unsure what to buy and how to build healthy meals. A large part of the challenge with choosing healthy foods, grocery shopping, and building healthy meals stems from the fact that our food environment has changed drastically over the last several decades. Along with fresh foods, we have a vast range of packaged, processed products to meet the demands for convenience, portability, and extended shelf life. Many processed, packaged products, however, lack the nutrients in whole foods or contain many added ingredients such as additives and preservatives, which might not always be optimal for our health. Grocery stores and product brands also have marketing promos that are designed to encourage you to buy their particular products.



How many times have we have been persuaded to by a product at the grocery store because of a food demo or promo, or that it was highlighted near the checkout line? How many of us have bought a product simply because it was on sale or offered as a bargain deal?

Cost is certainly a factor that affects our purchasing habits, especially given the rising prices of many foods and food products in the U. S. and abroad. However, the cheapest products might not always be the most nutritious, so it's important to evaluate the nutrient content of what you are buying as well. We'll walk you through a blueprint for evaluating the nutrient content of foods below. Let's take a closer look at these three challenges we face with grocery shopping in our current environment:

- 1. Food choice availability
- 2. Promotions and marketing by grocery stores
- 3. Product costs

#### Food Choice Availability

For the last several decades, the variety of packaged food products available to consumers has and continues to grow quite significantly (Researchdive, 2023; Mordor Intelligence, 2003). The decisions involved in buying food have become more complex, and it is not always clear what types of food products, especially packaged foods, are supportive of optimal health.

Having choices in any situation is usually good. However, having an abundance of choices of highly processed foods makes it challenging to:

- → Determine what exactly makes a food item "healthy."
- → Compare similar products and decide which one is the better or more nutritious option.
- → Avoid being tempted to buy products that are less nutritious or calorie dense that do not necessarily support our nutrition goals.

How many of you have gone to the grocery store to buy products such as cereal or crackers, and been overwhelmed at the number of options you have? If you've tried to pick a healthy breakfast cereal or package of crackers, how have you made that decision? It's not always easy, right? How many of you have also gone to the grocery store to buy fruits and vegetables, and wondered if frozen or canned would be better options since fresh produce tends to spoil quickly? But is frozen or canned nutritionally equivalent to fresh? (We answer this question in a little bit!)

# Promotions and Marketing Efforts

Food companies also spend a considerable budget on marketing their products, and grocery stores often have point-of-purchase displays (products conveniently placed near the checkout counter) that influence consumer's buying habits, especially during special events and holidays (Chandon, 2006; Chandon, 2009). For example, around the 4th of July in the U. S., many grocery stores have sales on products with greater sales margins, such as hotdogs, hamburgers, potato chips, and sodas. Around other holidays and events, such as Easter and Halloween, candy and desserts are heavily promoted. The deep discounts and sale prices might tempt you to

buy more and stock up on these items, but it's important to remember that they have limited nutritional value in our diet.

While it might be fine to consume these products on occasion, frequent intake of these types of foods might limit the intake of other more nutrient-dense options and might be associated with health risks (Juul et al., 2015; Canella et al., 2014). Many ultra-processed foods, such as soda, candy, and potato chips, are also often marketed as point-of-purchase products that can be difficult to resist and end up as impulse purchases. How many of you have been tempted to buy a candy bar or soda as you wait in the checkout line at the store? These impulse purchases can become difficult to resist when available at home. especially if they are left in plain view. A common scenario is where you might buy chips or cookies due to a promotion or sale (e.g., buy one, get one free), even though you had not planned to, and then leave them on your kitchen counter at home. These now become difficult to resist when you're at home on a weekend afternoon, or while watching TV in the evening. Sound familiar? If so, don't despair because we will walk you through strategies to avoid impulse buys, and strategically plan treats into your grocery shopping so that you can still enjoy them in moderation.

#### **Cost Comparison**

Many individuals think that buying healthy, nutritious options at the grocery store is expensive. While this might be true for some items such as organic meat, dairy products, and organic produce, some strategic planning prior to shopping can help maximize the quality of your diet without breaking your budget. Moreover, the cost of consuming cheaper, heavily processed, and nutrient-void products might be much higher in the long term when considering the potential

health risks associated with a poor diet (Juul et al., 2015; Canella et al., 2014).

If we look at the cost of food from a wider perspective and consider that it is the source of our energy intake as well as the micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients) that keep us healthy, we should consider the cost of supplements, medications, and medical care that we might need as a result of a poor diet when assessing the true value of what we buy. Whole and minimally processed foods tend to be the most nutrient dense, with a range of vitamins and minerals to support our health. A well-balanced, whole foods diet can minimize the need for expensive supplements to compensate for nutrient deficiencies.

Moreover, by promoting optimal health and reducing the risk of several chronic diseases related to poor diets, such as cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes (Centers for Disease Control, 2022; Monteiro, 2009), a healthy diet can actually be far less costly than paying for healthcare later in life. So, paying a little bit extra for quality, nutrient-dense foods might potentially save you in the long-term, both in quality of life, longevity, and also potentially in the need for supplements and medications for poor health. (Note that if you are taking medications for health conditions, you must consult with your healthcare provider prior to making any changes in your use of medication. You might also consult a Registered Dietitian to discuss any potential dietary changes to support your health.)

Ultra-processed foods tend to be cheaper due to the nature of their ingredients, which are often made of added sugars and fillers that have a low cost of production. Many of these foods are also made with lower costs of production than the amount of time and effort it takes to grow fruit,

vegetables, grains, and raise livestock (Tucker, 2018). However, the amount of processing that foods such as chips, sodas, and candy go through leaves them devoid of many nutrients, which are vital in supporting our health (Monteiro, 2009). You can still enjoy these foods on occasion, but ideally, they should not comprise the foundation or majority of your diet if you're looking to optimize your health and fitness.

Even though there are challenges to food shopping in our current environment, there are some steps you can follow to navigate them and support smarter grocery purchasing habits in the long term. This Guide to Smart Grocery Choices for Optimal Nutrition addresses these challenges, provides you with the knowledge and tools to make smarter choices, and gives you a blueprint for streamlining your meal planning and food shopping habits. The goal is to support you in optimizing your diet, and health and fitness goals.

The three tools that the next few sections focus on are:

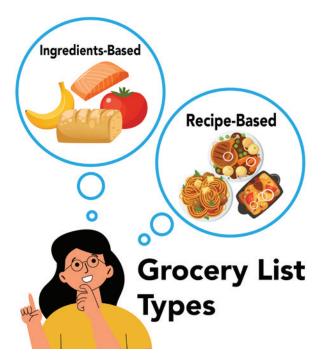
- → Planning a smart grocery list
- Evaluating food products with your health and nutrition goals in mind
- Staying within your budget, while maximizing your nutrient intake

These three tools will provide you with solid strategies for navigating all the challenges addressed above, and by the end of this guide, you will feel much more confident in navigating the grocery store with ease. You can work through each of these sections sequentially or jump to the section that is most relevant to your needs. Either way, remember to use the takeaways and tools provided on your next trip to the grocery store, either in person or online.

# Planning a Smart Grocery List

### **Smart Grocery List**

- Organizes shopping experience
- Prioritizes nutritious options
- Limits impulse buys
- Stay within a budget



Shopping with a grocery list is the first step in making smart choices at the store. Using a grocery list helps to organize your food shopping, prioritize nutritious options, limit impulse buys, and stay within a budget. It can also help to improve the quality of your diet and manage your weight (Dubowitz et al., 2017; Au et al., 2013). Planning a smart grocery list can be done in a couple of ways depending on your meal planning preferences. One option is to plan around specific recipes that you plan to make in any given week and the number of meals you plan to make.

A second option is to plan a grocery list based on staples in each food group: protein, starches, vegetables, fruit, fats, and build meals based on these staples. Neither option is better than the other, but either one is better than shopping without planning if you want to organize and improve the quality of your grocery list.

# A Smart Grocery List for Meal Planning with Recipes

If you are someone who enjoys meal planning with specific recipes for the week, a good place to start is to write a list of all the meals and recipes you plan on making and then list the specific ingredients you have on hand as well as those you need to purchase. The **Weekly Meal and Recipe Planner** provides a template that you can use to organize weekly meals and recipes that will help you create a list of groceries to purchase.

	Weekly Me Recipe Plar	nner 🖾	)	
Monday	B Protein Smoothie	Baked Cod Mediterranean Salad	PB Frozen fruit Wild Rice Apples	Milk Salad Chickpeas, Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Olives Cod Asparagus Wild rice
Tuesday	B Egg & Veggie Wrap	Chicken Tacos Egg Wrap Tuna Salad	Eggs Tuna Tacos	Wraps Chicken Avocados Greek yogurt
Wednesday	L S D			
Thursday	L S D			
Friday	B L S			
Saturday	B L S			
Sunday	B L S D			

A blank version of this grocery list is provided at the end of this guide that can be printed and used to help organize your grocery shopping trips.

After identifying recipes and meals for the week and assessing what foods you have on hand, it becomes easier to identify what specific foods and condiments you need to purchase for the week. The advantages to using this approach are that it enables you to plan for healthy meals and snacks for the week ahead and build your grocery list around the foods needed for them. This helps you avoid unnecessary purchases and streamline your list to buy foods for a particular purpose. This approach also enables you to build in occasional treats, such as dessert or chips, and plan for them in your diet, as opposed to buying these items in larger quantities and feeling tempted by them. This approach can be very helpful for those who enjoy having specific recipes for the week, are on a meal plan for health or performance, or are following a macro-based meal plan and enjoy planning all your meals and snacks ahead of time.

To make this list even more streamlined, see The Weekly Grocery List Planner Organized by Food Category to organize your "To Purchase" list by category and avoid back-tracking across the same aisles at the grocery store multiple times.

<b>Protein</b> Meat/ Poultry/Seafood) – Fresh	Proteins (Meat/ Poultry/Seafood) - Frozen	Frozen Fruit &
Cod Chicken	Shrimp	Vegetables Strawberries Blueberries Broccoli
	Grains	Dairy
		Eggs
	Pasta	2% Milk
	Brown Rice	Greek Yogurt Cottage Cheese
Canned Food		
Tuna Chickpeas		
Black Beans	Fresh Vegetables	Notes
	Salad Mix	
	Asparagus	
	Broccoli	
<sup>10</sup>	Cucumbers	1
Condiments/ Sauces	Tomatoes	0
Pasta Sauce Salsa		2
aisa		P
		-

A blank version of this grocery list is provided at the end of this guide that can be printed and used to help organize your grocery shopping trips.

Using a structured grocery list such as the one shown in the handout that is based on specific recipes and meals planned for the week can help to prioritize nutrient-dense foods, stay within a budget, and limit impulse purchases.

# A Smart Grocery List for Meal/Food Group Staples

Not everyone likes to meal plan with specific recipes in mind. If you prefer to make simple meals and repeat basic options for breakfast, lunch and snacks, a grocery list based on food groups, such as proteins, starches, fruits, vegetables, and fats might be a preferred option. This format identifies foods that you eat regularly based on your meal preferences and groups them under specific categories to optimize grocery shopping. The **Grocery List for Meal/Food Group Staples** provides an example of this type of grocery list, and the meals that you could prepare using it.



A blank version of this grocery list is provided at the end of this guide that can be printed and used to help organize your grocery shopping trips.



The advantage of using a food group grocery list is that it allows for some flexibility and variety with meals but without the commitment to specific recipes. Listing items in food groups or their macronutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, and fats) and sources of micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) helps you prioritize nutrient dense, and minimally processed items over junk foods and impulse buys. This can greatly improve the quality of your diet as well as help you stay within a budget while optimizing your intake.

Another option is a hybrid of the two lists, which includes a limited number of recipes each week with some staples to keep on hand. Whichever option you choose, plan it ahead of your grocery trip! Whether it is a printed list or a digital version on a phone or tablet, a structured list can help to optimize your choices and avoid unnecessary purchases.

## Online Grocery Shopping

Many choose to do some or part of their grocery shopping online versus in store. Some advantages of online grocery shopping are:

- → Less time spent in transit to and from stores
- Convenience
- Minimizes impulse purchases
- Ability to save and retrieve previously purchased items.
- → The latter option is particularly useful for those who like to buy staple foods and make similar meals week-to-week. Some disadvantages to online grocery shopping, aside from delivery fees and wait times, are:
  - Inability to select fresh produce and assess its quality
  - Limited control over comparing items
  - Product substitutes that might not be available (Hanus, 2016)

If you prefer to do some or part of your grocery shopping online, utilize features such as a favorites list to focus on nutrient dense options for meals versus processed food items.

Add your food group staples to a favorites list, similar to the **Grocery List for Meal/Food Group Staples**, to ensure that you prioritize these at every shopping occasion.



#### Whole vs. Processed Foods

In general, whole foods such as fruit, vegetables, eggs, fresh seafood, and meats tend to be the most nutrient-dense options because they are minimally processed and contain limited or no additives and preservatives. Ideally these should comprise the foundation of your grocery list. A good goal when food shopping is to select the least-processed options possible. **Table: Whole Food vs. Processed Options** provides examples of choices that are better options in various categories, such as protein and vegetables.

Whole Food vs. Processed Food Options				
Food Group/Category	Choose This (Less Processed)	Not That (More Processed)		
Protein: Chicken	Uncooked Chicken Breast* Chicken Thighs Whole Chicken	Chicken Nuggets Breaded Chicken Tenders Breaded Chicken Fillets		
Protein: Beef	Lean Ground Beef 93% Fat Free Lean Sirloin Lean Ground Round	Beef Sausage Beef Hot Dogs		
Starch: Potatoes	Whole Potatoes Baby Potatoes Sweet Potatoes Baked Oven Fries	Boxed Mashed Potatoes Potato Chips		
Vegetables: Spinach	Fresh Spinach Frozen Spinach (No Sauce)	Creamed Spinach Spinach & Artichoke Dip		
Vegetables: Green beans	Fresh Green Beans Frozen Green Beans	Canned Green Beans		

There are many packaged items such as pasta sauces, pasta, breads and cereals, that are minimally processed and also nutrient-dense options that can be part of a healthy diet. But, given the variety of choices for these types of items, it is not always easy to figure out which option is the healthiest or most nutritious. In fact, rather than looking at foods as healthy or unhealthy, it might be more useful to consider if a food product is nutritious, supportive of good health, and appropriate for *your* health needs and goals. There are certain criteria that you can use to evaluate food products with these questions in mind, and we'll walk you through these criteria in the next section.

# **Evaluating Food Products**

When buying foods, it is useful to consider how you plan on using the food item and its nutritional value. This helps you avoid unnecessary food purchases, and also evaluate whether a food item is nutrient dense and supportive of your health goals, or a product you might want to limit in your diet. This awareness and accountability while grocery shopping prioritizes your nutrition goals, and also gives you an opportunity to ask yourself, "Do I really need this item?" This might be particularly helpful if you find yourself reaching for ultra-processed foods such as chips, soda, or cookies when you go grocery shopping. Having a purpose for the food, evaluating its nutrient content, and considering how it is going to contribute towards your diet can help you avoid buying excess amounts of these types of ultra-processed foods, which are not supportive of optimal health (Juul et al., 2015; Canella et al., 2104).

Two ways to evaluate food products are:

- → Identifying what food group it fits into, and how you plan on using it in your diet.
- → Reviewing the nutrition label.

#### Food Groups

The major food groups highlighted in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* are proteins, grains/ starches, vegetables, fruits, and dairy. These groups are considered to be the foundations of a healthy diet, and adequate and appropriate amounts of foods in each category can meet our dietary needs for all nutrients. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans also discuss how to build nutritious meals and snacks using food groups to ensure a healthy and balanced diet. Thinking about these food groups while grocery shopping or building a grocery list can help steer you toward making nutritious purchases that go toward building healthy meals versus buying unnecessary or excess amounts of ultra-processed foods which do not conveniently fit into each of the food groups. An example of this is if you compare a vegetable such as broccoli to potato chips. Broccoli is part of the vegetable food group, but potato chips do not conveniently fit into any food group. They are made of potatoes, a starch, but they are also very high in fat and would not be considered a nutritious starch option at a meal. You could still buy both broccoli and potato chips, but the chips might be considered a treat item versus a meal staple.

Thinking about food groups can be helpful for two reasons:

- → It helps you identify whether the product is contributing to meals and adding nutrients to your diet.
- → It helps you acknowledge if the item is going to be a "treat" -- a dessert or snack -- that can still fit within a healthy diet in moderation.

If the product is going to be a treat, it might be helpful to limit the quantity you purchase and the variety (i.e., stick to one bag of chips versus more). Having more than one or two treat options at home

might encourage you to reach for them more often, but limiting the variety might help to reduce this temptation (Harvard School of Public Health, 2021).

#### **Nutrition Labels**

The nutrition label on packaged food products provides information about the nutrient content in one serving of that product. This enables us, as consumers, to review the nutritional value of a product and decide if it is supportive of our health goals before buying it. The nutrition label also enables you to compare a product to others in the same category and select the option most appropriate for your health goals.

Key information to look at on the nutrition label includes:

- Servings per container: How many servings does the item include?
- → Servings size: this is not necessarily YOUR portion size, but a reference amount for the information provided on the label.
- → Calories: The energy value per serving size indicated, and not always for the entire container.

Note that the information provided on the nutrition label is for the indicated serving size, and not for the entire container unless stated. Some products list both – the information per serving, and the amount in the entire package.

The nutrition label is a useful tool in helping you see the total calories in a serving size of a product, and also the amounts provided of the following nutrients:

- → Total Fat
- Saturated Fat
- Sodium
- Total Carbohydrate
- → Fiber
- Total and Added Sugars
- → Protein
- → Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, and Potassium

<b>Nutrition Fa</b>	cts
5 servings per container Serving size 1 bar	r (60g)
Amount per serving Calories 2	220
	ly Value*
Total Fat 8g	10%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 140mg	6%
Total Carbohydrate 30g	11%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Total Sugars 12g	
Includes 10g Added Sugars	20%
Protein 4g	
Vitamin D 2mcg	10%
Calcium 260mg	20%
Iron 8mg	45%
Potassium 240mg	6%
* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how mucl in a serving of food contributes to a daily of	

ion	) F	ac	ts
per cont	ainer	1 cup	(225g
	Per serving 290		74(
% Dai	ily Value*	% Da	ily Value
13g	17%	33g	42%
7g	35%	18g	90%
0g		0g	
35mg	12%	95mg	32%
1120mg	49%	2820mg	1239
33g	12%	83g	30%
1g	4%	3g	119
4g		10g	
0g	0%	0g	0%
11g		28g	
1mag	60/	2mag	109
			459
			209
166ma	4%	417mg	89
	% Dai 13g 7g 0g 35mg 1120mg 33g 1g 4g 0g 111g 1mcg 233mg 1mg	Per serving 290  % Daily Value* 13g 17% 7g 35% 0g 35mg 12% 1120mg 49% 33g 12% 19 4% 4g 0g 0% 11g 1mcg 6% 239mg 20% 1mg 6%	Per serving   290

calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends limiting some of these nutrients -- saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars -- in our diet for optimal health (Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025), so it is important to look at these values on a product before purchasing it.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting total fat to 20 to 35% of calories, and saturated fat to less than 10% of calories in our diet. The percent daily value (% DV) on the nutrition label can help you see how much a serving of a product is contributing towards these limits.

<b>Nutr</b> i Serving Size Servings Pe	1 cup (228	3g)	CLS	
g				
Amount Per S				
Calories 25	50 Calo	ries from	Fat 110	
		% Dai	ly Value*	
Total Fat 1	2g		18%	
Saturated	Fat 3a		15%	
Trans Fat				
Cholester	•		10%	
Sodium 47			20%	
		0.4		
Total Carbohydrate 31g 10%				
Dietary Fiber 0g 10%				
Sugars 5g				
Protein 5g				
Vitamin A			4%	
Vitamin C			2%	
Calcium			20%	
-				
Iron			4%	
* Percent Daily Va Your Daily Value your calorie need	alues are based s may be highe eds.	on a 2,000 or or lower de	calorie diet. pending on	
	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 Carbohydra Dietary Fiber	ate	300g	375g	
		25g	30g	

The Percent Daily Value (% DV) is / a comparison tool found on nutrition labels.

A % DV of 5 or under indicates a low amount of the nutrient.

A % DV of 20% or higher indicates a high amount of the nutrient.

It's recommended to choose products with less than 20% of the daily value.

For fiber, a % DV of 20% or higher is a good choice to increase intake.

The Percent Daily Value (% DV) on a nutrition label can be a helpful comparison tool to compare different products within the same category (e.g., bread). The % DV indicates what percentage of your daily needs for a nutrient are provided in one serving of the product, based on a 2000 calorie diet. A % DV of 5 or under means that the product is low in that nutrient. A % DV of 20% or higher means that it is high in that nutrient. For nutrients such as sodium, you might want to look for a product with less than 20% of your daily value. In contrast, for fiber, a product with a % DV of 20% or higher would be a good choice for increasing your fiber intake. Use the nutrition label to determine if a product fits within your needs for various nutrients such as fat, saturated fat, sodium, fiber and added sugar, and compare it to

other products to make an informed purchasing decision.



Sodium might be of concern to individuals who have certain health conditions such as high blood pressure. If this applies to you, then you might want to limit your intake of products that contain

large amounts of it. Many packaged products such as soups, sauces, salad dressings, cheese, and deli meats can contain large amounts of sodium, and reviewing the nutrition label on these foods can help you choose alternate options that are lower in sodium and more appropriate for your health.



Sugar is a type of carbohydrate and a source of energy in your diet. Many foods such as fruit, vegetables, and dairy include natural sugars that are an inherent part of the food. However, added sugars are those that have been added to a food item. For example, most sweetened yogurts, juice, jams and jellies, and desserts contain added sugars. Current dietary guidelines recommend limiting added sugars to less than 20% of our daily caloric intake to avoid excess, unnecessary calories in our diet (Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025). The % DV value for added sugars on the nutrition label is helpful for evaluating and comparing products and choosing items with less added sugars. Some products for which this comparison can be useful are:

- Sweetened yogurts
- → Sauces
- Breakfast cereals and granola
- Breakfast bars
- Oatmeal



Another nutrient that is important to review on a nutrition label is fiber, as many of us do not get enough of it in our diet. Fiber from whole grains, legumes, fruit, and vegetables is a non-digestible carbohydrate that is important for optimizing gut health, heart health, and preventing constipation. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that adult men aim for 30 to 34 grams of fiber per day and women aim for 25 to 28 grams per day (Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025). Foods such as fruit, vegetables, legumes (beans, lentils), and whole grains contain fiber. However, many refined grain products made with white flour lose much of their fiber through processing. For these types of products, as well as any packaged products made with flour (bread, cereals etc.), use the nutrition label to compare fiber content, and select brands that have a higher % DV to meet your needs.

Products for which you might want to review fiber content include:

- Breakfast cereals and granola
- → Pasta
- → Rice
- Bread, wraps, and tortillas
- Crackers

Taking the time to review foods for their nutritional value and considering how they fit into your diet can help you make better food purchasing decisions. Thinking about which food group a

product falls into, how you plan on using it, and evaluating its nutritional content using the nutrition label can help you avoid impulse purchases and select products that support your health goals. These few steps can help you optimize your nutrient intake and improve the overall quality of your diet.

# Ingredient List

Per USDA regulations, the ingredient list on packaged foods must indicate ingredients in descending order of prevalence, so the ingredient present in the largest amount is listed first. This is helpful to look at foods such as cereals, granola, and bread. If sugar is the first item listed, then it might not be the most optimal choice for you if you are limiting added sugar in your diet. Try to select foods where the first ingredient listed is the primary base of the product. For example, for bread, whole grains should be the first ingredient versus salt, sugar, or water.



Some common ingredients found in packaged foods that are substitutes for sugar are listed below. You don't necessarily need to avoid buying products with these ingredients, but it is helpful to recognize what they are and note where they are on the ingredient list. The **Common Ingredients in Packaged Foods** lists some of the common ingredients found in packaged foods, what they mean, and whether you should avoid or limit their intake.

Common Ingredients in Packaged Foods			
Ingredient Name	What It Is	Avoid or Limit?	
Maltodextrin	An inexpensive, processed, easily digestible carbohydrate is usually added to thicken foods. A quick source of energy for athletes and active individuals.	Limit large amounts if high blood sugar is a concern. Athletes and active individuals need not limit for use in activity or sport.	
High Fructose Corn Syrup  Added sugar. A processed sweetener made with corn that contains a slightly higher amount of fructose versus glucose.		Limit large amounts in the diet because it is an added sugar. Excess amounts are potentially associated with adverse long-term health issues (Stanhope et al., 2009).	

Fructose Dextrose Invert Sugar Crystalline Fructose	Added sugars.	Limit large amounts because they are an added sugar.
Carrageenan, Guar Gum, Xanthan Gum	Thickeners and binders added to foods. Xanthan gum is often used in gluten-free products as a binder.	On the Food and Drug Administration's Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) list of ingredients allowed in foods.  Some research suggests adverse effects with excess amounts of carrageenan (Tobacman, 2001; Borthakur et al., 2012; Barth et al., 2016).
Sodium Nitrite	A preservative added to processed meats to preserve color and prevent bacterial growth while unopened.	Avoid or limit if possible. Many studies have found adverse effects associated with excess intake of nitrates. Try to find products without added nitrites as much as possible.
Sodium Benzoate	A preservative added to sodas, carbonated beverages, and some types of acidic foods like pickles and dressings.	On the Food and Drug Administration's Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) list of ingredients allowed in foods. However, limit excess amounts in the diet. Some studies indicate adverse effects on individuals with ADHD (Bateman et al., 2004; Beezhold et al., 2014).

Note that **Table: Common Ingredients in Packaged Foods** is not a comprehensive list of all ingredients added to packaged foods, but a list of the common ones you might see in ingredient lists. All of these are on the Food and Drug Administration's Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) list of ingredients allowed in foods. However, as noted in **Table: Whole Food vs. Processed Options**, it is advisable to limit excess amounts of some such as sodium nitrite, sodium benzoate, and carrageenan due to potential adverse health risks. Reviewing the ingredient list on foods, as well as the nutrition label, can help you make smarter choices when food shopping. Both of these tools help you select products that support your health goals while avoiding or limiting those that do not promote optimal health in the long-term.

# Staying Within a Budget

Staying within a budget while grocery shopping can be a challenge at times. How many times have you added extra items to your cart, in-store or online, and then realize you spent more than you had planned on? If this sounds like something you struggle with, here are tips on staying within your grocery budget when you shop.

# Tip 1: Plan Ahead and Use a Grocery List

Planning your meals and grocery list ahead of time not only helps to optimize your nutritional intake, but also helps to stay organized and avoid unnecessary, impulse purchases, which can put you over budget. Planning weekly meal ideas, either with recipes or meal staples and food groups, also enables you to select items within your budget and plan around grocery sales. Many stores have weekly sales on items, including meat, poultry, eggs, dairy, and produce.



These are usually advertised online and in catalogs available at store entrances. Shopping with a grocery list can help you identify and select potential substitutes for certain items such as proteins and vegetables that might be on sale. In most recipes, you can substitute vegetables, and if you shop for staples, buying produce that is on

sale might help you extend your budget on other items that are more expensive, such as organic meat and poultry (Ducrot et al., 2017; American Heart Association, 2016).

# Tip 2: Avoid Distracting Sales

Using a grocery list can also help you avoid distracting sales, including sales on items that you did not plan on buying. One pitfall of using a sales flyer is the temptation to buy junk or snack foods that are on sale, such as soda, cookies, ice cream, or chips. While these items are not off-limits within an overall healthy diet, having multiple junk foods at home can increase the temptation to snack on these (Monteiro, 2009). Using a grocery list to limit snack and junk foods to one or two options can help to avoid this temptation and remain with a pre-defined budget.



# Tip 3: Cost Comparison

While planning ahead can be incredibly helpful for choosing nutritious options and avoiding impulse purchases, you can employ some flexibility in substituting fresh or frozen foods to stay within your budget. Frozen fruit and vegetables tend to be just as nutritious as fresh, and they last longer and are often less expensive (British Heart Foundation, 2022). If you find yourself throwing away unused fresh vegetables most weeks, try buying frozen to avoid food waste and extending your budget.



Buying produce that is in season and locally produced can also help you save some money, as it tends to be less costly than produce that has to be transported from longer distances. Organic foods tend to cost more than conventional produce, meat, and poultry. However, with some planning, you can extend your budget to include nutrient-dense organic meats, dairy, and produce in your diet. One strategy is to check for store sales on organic foods and see if you can swap any produce on your list for their organic counterparts that are on sale. Another strategy is to reserve your organic budget for meats, dairy, and poultry, which can have a more nutrient-dense profile than their conventional counterparts and buy mostly

conventional produce or produce listed on the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) Annual Clean Fifteen list.



Each year, the EWG reviews data from the USDA to compile a list of the produce with the most and least amounts of pesticide. These lists are called the Dirty Dozen (twleve12 produce items with the most pesticide), and the Clean Fifteen (15 produce items with the least pesticide). These lists can be found on the EWG website and are updated annually.

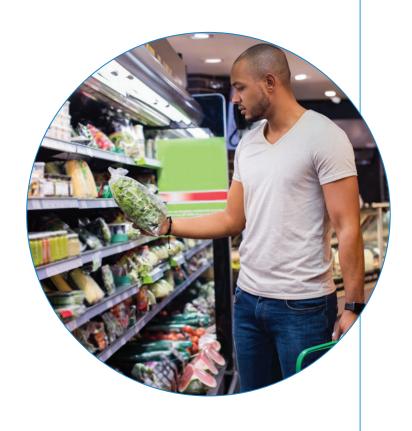
By comparing costs, reviewing sales flyers, and making smart substitutions that are cost effective (e.g., frozen vs. fresh) for some food items, you can extend your food budget and include quality ingredients that support your health. Also remember that not everything organic is nutritious! Organic cookies are still cookies and do not contribute quality nutrients to your diet. Plan ahead for meals and snacks and focus on nutrient-dense foods from the food groups for the foundation of your diet and the bulk of your grocery purchases.

### Conclusion

Grocery shopping does not have to be an intimidating or budget-breaking experience. Whether you do all or some of your shopping online or prefer to shop in a physical store, planning ahead and going in prepared can help you choose the most nutritious items, avoid unnecessary and less healthy purchases, and stay within a budget. Some tools to optimize your shopping experience are:

- 1. Plan ahead. Plan some meals and meal staples ahead of time and use these ideas to build a grocery list. Take stock of what foods and ingredients you have at home before heading to the store.
- 2. Use a grocery list. Whether your meal-plan with recipes or favorite staples, list the foods that you need to buy ahead of time and organize them by food groups. This strategy helps you focus on nutrient-dense items that factor into meals and nutritious snacks while also avoiding impulse buys.
- 3. Focus on whole foods and minimally processed foods to limit unnecessary additives in your diet. Build your meal plan with as many whole foods as possible and use minimally processed packaged items that factor into meals, such as pasta and pasta sauce.
- foods. Review the total fat and saturated fat content on proteins, dairy, and other foods that naturally contain fat. Look at the sodium content in canned or boxed foods, such as soup, to select lower sodium options based on your health goals. Compare the fiber content of cereals, breads, and grains to select a higher fiber option to help meet your daily needs. Check the amount of added sugar in yogurts and other foods that are sweetened to pick an option that better meets your needs.

- 5. Review a sales flyer, on-line or in store, to scope out potential sales on whole foods to help stay within a budget. However, try not to get distracted by sales on "junk foods," and using a grocery list as a starting point might help you remain focused.
- 6. Buy local, in-season, and frozen produce as these are usually less costly. This allows you to extend your grocery budget and include quality ingredients, such as organic meats and dairy, that are more expensive but tend to be more nutrient dense than their conventional counterparts.



#### What You Can Do Now

Now that you have a list of tools to employ at your next grocery trip, here are some action actions to start on:

- 1. Evaluate the quality of your diet. Write out your usual choices for meals and identify how often you eat or order out, the meals and snacks you prepare at home, and whether you eat predominantly whole foods or packaged, processed foods.
- **2.** Plan your meals. For meals that you prepare at home, identify what types of foods you tend to buy. Some questions to ask yourself are:
  - → Am I choosing whole food options to prepare meals, or am I relying on convenience options?
  - Do I look at the nutrition label and ingredient list of the packaged foods I buy?
  - → Are there better alternatives for the packaged foods I buy? Alternatives that are lower in fat, sodium, and added sugar, and higher in fiber?
  - What meals and snacks do I plan on making over the next week?

- **3.** Build a grocery list. Take stock of the foods and ingredients you have at home and compose a list of the items you need to purchase. List them in categories using the food groups, such as. proteins, starches, and vegetables.
- **4.** Review your list of packaged items you might need. Make a note to review the nutrition label and ingredient list on these products and compare them to other items in the same category.
- 5. Look at sales flyers. This is a great tool if you have a budget for your purchases. See if there are any smart substitutes you can make, such as purchasing local or frozen produce, organic proteins, or dairy items that are on sale.

## Online Resources

Want to learn more about nutrition? Here are a few places to find reliable information and insight about nutrition and healthy eating behaviors.

- → NASM Certified Nutrition Coach Certification (NASM-CNC)
- → NASM Blog
- → NASM YouTube Channel

Weekly Meal & Recipe Planner

		Recipes to Make	Have at home	Groceries to Buy
	В			
Monday	L			
	S			
	D			
	В			
day	L	-		
Tuesday	<b>S</b>			
	D			
ay	В			
Wednesday	L			
Vedr	s			
	D			
>	В			
Thursday	L			
를	S			
	D			
	В			
ay	L			
Friday	s			
	D			
	В			
day	L			
Saturday	S			
S	D			
	В			
ay	L			
Sunday	S			
S	D			

# Weekly Grocery List Planner Organized by Category

Protein (Meat/ Poultry/Seafood) – Fresh	Proteins (Meat/ Poultry/Seafood) - Frozen	Frozen Fruit & Vegetables
	Grains	Dairy
Canned Food	Fresh Vegetables	Notes
Condiments/ Sauces		

# **Grocery List for Meal/Food Group Staples**

Food Group	Foods to Buy	Notes
	-	-
	-	
		-
	-	-
	-	

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# THANKS FOR READING!













