

Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Trim costs while buying more produce

Two of my New Year's resolutions are to eat more fruits and vegetables and to spend less at the grocery store. Other than watching for sales on produce, what are some ideas to help?

Those are two great resolutions. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend that adults get two to three cups of vegetables and 1.5 to two cups of fruit a day. Keep in mind that it's important to get a wide variety. Apples and green beans are fine, but you'll want to spread your wings a bit and eat other types of produce to get the benefits you're looking for from fruits and vegetables.

And you don't have to assume that eating more healthfully will be more expensive. A 2012 study by the Economic Research Service, "Are Healthy Foods Really More Expensive?" found that healthy foods, including fruits and vegetables, are often less expensive per serving than foods that are higher in saturated fat, added sugar or sodium or that contribute little to meeting the dietary recommendations. So, if you're smart about buying fruits and vegetables and at the same time buy fewer less-healthy foods, your grocery bill could easily go down.

Here are some ideas to help you achieve your goals:

- For fresh fruits and vegetables, become familiar with what's in season. You're more likely to find good prices on in-season produce, but you first need to know what to look for. For an extensive list, visit the "Fruits and Veggies: More Matters" website at fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org and click on "What's in season?"
- Don't forget the canned and frozen sections of the grocery store. As long as you have the pantry and freezer space, here's where sales



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can really help trim costs. Store brands are normally the most economical, but sometimes price reductions on name brands will surprise you, especially if you have a coupon. For health, look for low-sodium canned goods and frozen produce without added sugar or sauces.

- If you have options on where to shop, check them out. Many people head to the nearest grocery store out of convenience, but better deals could be just down the road. Just be cautious about impulse purchases: Shopping at additional stores provides more opportunities to spend money you didn't plan on. And don't be tempted to drive so far that the cost of gas undermines your grocery savings.
- Be sure to eat what you have on hand before it goes bad. According to a 2014 Economic Research Service report, American consumers throw away 90 billion pounds of food per year, including 9.5 billion pounds of fresh fruit and 12.8 billion pounds of fresh vegetables. That's not only wasted food, but money down the drain. To reduce waste, plan meals and snacks, and purchase only what your family can eat while it's fresh. And keep fresh produce as visible as possible — in a bowl on the kitchen counter (if it doesn't have to be kept cool) or at the front of the refrigerator.

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Editor: This column was reviewed by Dan Remley, field specialist in Food, Nutrition and Wellness for Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

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