

Secrets to Cutting Grocery Costs

Here are some things to keep in mind to avoiding paying too much for groceries and start reducing your grocery spending.

The supermarket is designed to slow you down as much as possible. Every extra minute you spend lingering will cost you \$1.70 according to current research. (See Woman's World, April 11, 2000, page 44.)

This is why milk is put way at the back. A store is often designed so that you cannot even follow a straight path to the back but must move around the produce, the fresh baked bread, and the large displays in the middle of the aisles. The "large economy size" may cost you 50% more than the regular size on a per unit basis.

Everyone assumes that the larger size is always cheaper, which normally it should be since it usually costs less to package, ship and stock. However, there are plenty of exceptions. Store-brands may be made by national-brand manufacturers.

Many store brands are made by the same companies who sell much more expensive brand-name products often only a few feet from their store-brand step children. Being a captive audience at the check-out counter sells impulse items.

When you are bored and standing in line at the check-out counter, you may find yourself reaching for a magazine, a pack of batteries, duct tape, or chewing gum. It turns out that this section of the store sells roughly 3x as much merchandise per square foot as the rest of the store (Food Marketing Institute, Washington DC). Often these are high profit items. Batteries, for example, usually sell for less at discount department stores.

Eye level commands attention and sells, so companies pay big bucks to place their products at adult eye level for adult sales or children's eye level for children's sales.

Stocking fees or "slotting allowances" are often paid to place products at eye level. Brand-name products and high profit products are often sold this way.

Non-food convenience items such as headache medicine, motor oil, office supplies, and light bulbs are often over priced and can be bought for less at other stores.

Fast growing "convenience" sections for many supermarkets are personal care, car products, office supplies, home hardware areas. I have personally compared prices at supermarkets on these items and find them to be much higher than at Wal-Mart or Kmart. Supermarkets will bargain with you.

Food that is about to go out of date or is going ripe can often be bought at a substantial discount. Milk, dairy products, meat, bread, fruit and vegetables can be bargained for under these circumstances. The trick is to talk to the manager of each department, who will often mark down these items. Scanners make mistakes; most mistakes are on sale items or produce.

Scanners do make mistakes, but most often on sale items. The reason is that the price of sale item has to be changed from the regular price. When this happens, mistakes often occur. Keep an eagle eye out for the price of any sale item as it is scanned and compare it to the sales flier provided by the store. Mistakes occur with produce, because there is no bar-code.

Since a head of lettuce does not have a bar-code you might find yourself being charged by the pound instead of by the head as the sign at the produce section indicated. With a long line of customers impatiently waiting to be checked out, few customers will take the time to protest.

Coffee is often over priced.

Several articles point out that high priced coffee is often about the same as coffee selling for half as much. At SAVVY-DISCOUNTS.com we have found that the cost of coffee is less important than way that the coffee is made. Measuring is critical. A slightly bitter taste means that more water or fewer grounds should be used. A slightly weak taste indicates the opposite. Once you have figured out an exact measurement even store-brand coffee made correctly will taste better than expensive coffee made incorrectly.

A check cashing courtesy card may be used to track your purchases and personal habits.

That convenient check cashing card provides a way to identify you. It can be used to track your purchases and offer you coupons targeted to your buying history.

"Themed" displays may hide higher costs.

When you see a summer barbecue grouping of hamburgers, buns, mustard, catsup, mayonnaise, napkins, paper plates, cups, plastic utensils and charcoal with the buns on sale, realize that the other items may expensive.

Coupons are not the great deal they once were.

The average value of a coupon (adjusted for inflation) keeps getting smaller. The length of time before a coupon expires keeps getting shorter. In addition coupons, these days, are often for new items that you had not planned on buying anyway.

Some packages are being reduced in weight, but the packaging looks the same.

It is hard to raise prices, so some manufacturers are reducing the amount of food in the package. They keep the item the same size with the same look but with a new weight printed on the package.

You may be buying and being sold a robustness that you do not need.

Incredibly strong and incredibly expensive napkins may be more than you need. Super heavy plastic garbage bags or locking plastic storage bags that won't drip even when filled with water and turned upside down, may be over kill. Why pay extra if you don't need this?

Many expensive cleaning products could be made at home for much less, with less damage to the environment.

Just a few simple common household items can be mixed and/or diluted to do most cleaning jobs (for example: lemon juice, vinegar, baking soda). Instead of a pantry full of half-used toxic chemicals that are for very specific jobs, you can make yours for less money and with less damage to the environment. (See: Cheaper and Better: Handmade Alternatives to Storebought Goods, Nancy Birnes, Shadow Lawn Press - Perennial Library (Harper & Row).)

This article was excerpted from "17 THINGS THAT YOUR GROCER DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW" from savvy-discounts.com