

Supermarket Saving\$: 16 Tips that Total BIG Bucks!

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<http://lancaster.unl.edu/food>



It's possible to save money shopping for groceries without cooking everything from scratch, packing your purse with coupons, or purchasing foods in season.

Here are 16 easy tips that total big bucks. An example is given for each with the potential savings from: (1) spending less and/or (2) avoiding losing money through tossing uneaten foods. The possible grand total saved is given at the end of this article. **A dollar saved is even better than a dollar earned: You don't have to pay taxes on it!** Prices are rounded to the nearest 25 cents and may vary by store and region.

1. Keep a grocery list. Gas for an extra trip to the store easily can add a dollar or more to your grocery bill. And the less you shop, the less likely you'll make an impulse purchase. Keep a grocery list where it's easily accessible, such as on the fridge, and remember to take it with you to the grocery store. Stick to your list for added savings, but do stay flexible if you encounter a sale.

EXAMPLE:

1. Gas to drive four miles for an extra trip to the store: **\$1.00 (or more!).**
2. Impulse purchase of snack crackers at the store: **An additional \$2.50 spent.**

2. Garbage check. We lose money whenever we toss food because it spoiled before we got around to eating it. If leftovers get the "heave ho" because they're left too long, we're putting money in the garbage can. Make planning to avoid tossing foods a priority.

Consider: If wilted lettuce is a frequent occupant of your garbage can, serve more salads at the beginning of the week. If extra mashed potatoes get tossed because they've lingered too long in the fridge, make less next time. Or recycle them as potato patties, shepherd's pie or potato soup within a day or two of making them. Other ideas: Use ripe bananas in banana bread; add juice to smoothies or make popsicles; freeze leftovers for another meal.

EXAMPLE: Tossing a half bag of "tired" lettuce: **\$1.00.**

3. Avoid shopping when hungry. Everything looks



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good on an empty stomach. It's all too easy to buy something to tide us over in the car until we make it home. Eating before shopping not only helps forestall impulse buys, it may save calories. If you're shopping with your kids, feed them, too.

EXAMPLE: Buying an energy bar at the grocery store to tide you over until you get home: **\$1.50 spent.**

4. Brown bag it. If you normally eat out at noon, consider brown bagging it at least once a week. The typical fast food meal easily can cost \$5.00 or more. Take leftovers from the evening meal to work the next day. Or, a peanut butter sandwich and a piece of whole fruit are quick to pack.

NOTE: You may save money on your children's lunch by having them participate in the school lunch program. They can eat a balanced meal, offered at a reasonable price.

EXAMPLE:

1. Eating a sack lunch once a week: **Save \$2.50.**
2. Eating a sack lunch 5 days a week: **Save \$12.50.**

5. Coupon common sense. Use coupons only for foods you normally would eat, rather than for "extras." Don't miss out on potential sources of valuable coupons. Check your grocery receipt – sometimes there are great coupons on the back that help save money. Also, if you have access to a computer, check online for coupons. For starters, check the Web site of the store where you shop or of products you use. Often the Web site address for many foods is given on the product label.

If possible, shop on double or triple coupon days when a store increases the value of coupons. Grocery store loyalty cards may be another source of savings, offering in-store discounts to cardholders.

EXAMPLE:

1. Using two 50-cent coupons for items you DO use: **Save \$1.00.**
2. NOT buying that NEW dessert mix: **Save \$2.00**

6. Check expiration dates. Avoid buying a food that is past its prime. If it's on sale and near its expiration date, use it soon.

EXAMPLE: Avoid dumping a half gallon of old, soured milk down the drain: **Save \$2.50.**

Know how. Know now.



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7. Small scale experiments. Before trying a new food, buy the smallest size of package. If your family doesn't like the food, you're not stuck with a big box.

EXAMPLE: Buying a small container of a new spice that you later discover your family won't eat: **Save \$1.50.**

8. Costly convenience foods. How much time do you really save when buying a convenience food? It takes just a few seconds to mix your own sugar and cinnamon rather than buying it pre-mixed. Microwaving a bowl of regular oatmeal rather than pouring hot water over a pre-measured package adds only a few minutes.

You're likely to save by cutting fruits and veggies yourself. Plus, the pre-cut ones won't keep as long.

EXAMPLE: Buying a carton of old-fashioned or quick oatmeal that provides 30 servings vs. buying 3 boxes instant oatmeal that contain 10 packets each: **Save \$5.50.**

9. Staple food stock up. Invest in staple foods when they're on sale.

Buying a boatload of bananas (and other perishable foods) isn't a very good long-term investment. Stocking up on staples such as reduced-price canned tuna or tomato sauce can be. Remember: Check expiration dates.



EXAMPLE: Stocking up on 10 cans of food reduced by 20 cents apiece: **Save \$2.00.**

10. Bulking up when the price is right and you can use it. First, do the math and check if you actually do save by buying a larger package. The cost of two foods of the smaller size may be a better price than the larger one. Plus, will you use the food while the flavor is still tasty? Always check it out. If the larger size meets your criteria, go for it!

EXAMPLE: Buying a 5-pound bag of rice instead of a 1-pound bag: **Save \$1.50.**

11. Store brand savings. Store brands are comparable in nutrition to name brands. And, taste-wise, there may be little difference. In some comparisons, they have been preferred over the name brands.

Some store brands may vary more in size, color, or texture than name brands. This may be unimportant, however, depending on use. A less than perfect-appearing vegetable may be just fine if used in a casserole or soup.

Store brands and lower-priced brands tend to be positioned on the top and bottom shelves. The national brands are more likely to be on the middle shelves.

EXAMPLE: Buying just two store brands and saving 50-cents on each: **Save \$1.00.**

12. Prevent food flops. Check preparation methods for unfamiliar foods. Perhaps that tropical fruit looked enticing at the store. If you're don't know how to prepare it or where to find information once you bring it home, think again. Or, that new cut of meat – do you slowly roast it or can it be grilled? Either way, find out or risk a food flop.

Often the produce person or the meat manager at the store can give you some tips. Many produce departments have books with descriptions of all the items, what they taste like, how to prepare them, etc.

EXAMPLE: Avoiding that purchase of self-rising flour and finding it won't work in your recipe: **Save \$2.50.**

13. Beware of snack attacks. Unless you're fairly active and need the calories, enjoy snacks, such as chips, cookies, candy, etc. in limited amounts. You'll save money and may lose unwanted pounds at the same time!

EXAMPLE: Buy one less bag of chips weekly: **Save \$2.00.**

14. Shop the specials. Plan your menus around sale items, especially more expensive purchases such as meat.

Buying several packages of meat on sale and freezing it may save quite a bit. "It is safe to freeze meat or poultry directly in its supermarket wrapping but this type of wrap is permeable to air," advises the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS). "Unless you will be using the food in a month or two, over wrap these packages as you would any food for long-term storage using airtight heavy-duty foil, (freezer) plastic wrap or freezer paper, or place the package inside a (freezer) plastic bag." When repackaging family packs into smaller amounts, USDA/FSIS also recommends these wraps.

While raw ground meat maintains optimum quality in the freezer for 3 to 4 months, larger pieces of meat like steaks or chops maintain optimum quality for 4 to 12 months. At 0 degrees F, frozen foods remain safe indefinitely. Thaw meat in the refrigerator on a plate on the bottom shelf so it doesn't drip onto other foods.

EXAMPLE: Buying meat on sale: **Save \$2.00.**

15. Think before you drink: Buy a reusable water bottle and fill it with tap water. Your investment soon pays for itself. Limit amount of soft drinks and fancy coffees.

EXAMPLE: Drinking tap water vs. buying a 12 pack of bottled water: **Save \$4.00.**

16. "Checkout" temptation. OK, you've almost made it to the finish line ... don't stumble now as you approach the checkout lane. As you're waiting in line, think twice before buying some last-minute temptation.

EXAMPLE: Resist a magazine with a new diet: **Save \$3.50.**

GRAND TOTAL: The more of these tips you use and the more foods you use them with, the more you can save. Case in point: If you used each of the preceding examples in ONE shopping trip a week, you could save as much as \$40 a week. **Multiply that by 52 weeks and the savings would be ... TA DA! ... over \$2,000 yearly!**

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