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# FIRST AIDS TO FOOD BUYING

## No. 1

### Market Basket Mastery Series

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**W**hat should I buy? When should I buy? What should I pay? Where should I buy? The answers to these questions can lead the way to mastery of the market basket.

Buying food is more of a business today than it's ever been before. Many of the products in our markets now were not there ten years ago. How to make wise selections from 5 or 6 thousand items in the food market is complex. This list is growing daily.

Money is the resource most often given first consideration. But time and effort have become increasingly important to many families where Mother works outside the home. Which is of greater value is an individual decision. When deciding, you want to make certain that what you save (whether it be time, effort, and/or money) is not foolishly wasted elsewhere.

## **Making Your Food Budget**

The food you select depends upon many factors:

1. Number, age, activity and nutritional needs of each family member.
2. Your income and family expenses.
3. Time available for preparation.
4. Skill in shopping and preparation.
5. Amount of preservation and preparation done at home.
6. Family habits and preferences.
7. Family entertaining and meals eaten at home.

On the average, American families spend slightly over one-fifth of their take-home pay for food.

Since food is the key to your family's vigor and good health, one of the best ways to help insure it is through wise management of your food dollar.

Food of equal nutritional value is available in a wide range of costs. Your family can be well fed for much less than most people spend for food. Higher priced foods do not necessarily provide more nutrition.

Average the cost of foods. Serve an inexpensive food with a more expensive one.

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# PLAN

**P**lan from three days to a week in advance. This saves on your grocery bill as well as time in shopping. Plan in units of three meals (plus snacks for teenagers, especially) for a day. As

## A DAILY

### MILK GROUP

Some Milk for everyone

Children .....	3 to 4 cups
Teen-agers .....	4 or more cups
Adults .....	2 or more cups
Pregnant women .....	4 or more cups
Nursing mothers .....	6 or more cups

### MEAT GROUP

2 or more servings

Beef, veal, pork, lamb, poultry, fish, eggs.  
As alternates—dry beans, dry peas, nuts.

**P**lan your time schedule as well as your meals. On days when you have the least time, choose meals that need less cooking.

## Make a Grocery List

You save time because you avoid aimless wandering through stores. Also you are less likely to forget needed items which make another trip necessary. Your list can be flexible. If you find an especially good buy at the store, your meal plans can be revised, but—**don't** be an "impulse buyer."

Be sure the substitute food is one which supplies about the same food value as the one planned originally.

## Where to Shop

Judge your market on food quality and prices. Stores which offer special services such as telephone orders, delivery, Sunday and late hours or credit may charge higher prices. Be sure the advantages to you are worth any extra price.

The nearest store does not always have the lowest prices. Be sure to "count in" transportation charges if you must travel quite a distance to buy from less expensive stores.

# AHEAD

you plan meals check them to see that the recommended amounts of foods in the following four groups are included.

## FOOD PLAN

### VEGETABLE FRUIT GROUP

4 or more servings

Include:

A citrus fruit or other fruit or vegetable important for vitamin C.

A dark-green or deep-yellow vegetable for vitamin A—at least every other day.

Other vegetables and fruits, including potatoes.

### BREAD CEREAL GROUP

4 or more servings

Whole grain, enriched, restored breads and cereals. Check labels to be sure.

Check your food supplies at home. It is helpful to keep a pad and pencil in the kitchen so that you can list staples as supplies get low.

## When to Shop

This will depend on your schedule of activities and the amount of free time you have. It is wise to shop when stores are well stocked and offer good buys. If possible, shop when stores are least crowded. This varies in different stores and neighborhoods. Find out, through personal observation, which is the best time for you. If you must shop after work, evenings or on Saturdays, try to do so when you are not overly tired and have sufficient time to select the items best suited to your purpose. Try to make as few shopping trips as possible, in order to save both time and effort.

“Specials” are usually advertised toward the latter part of the week. These are often foods in extra-heavy supply available at low costs, or may be featured as leaders to meet competition. Taking advantage of these frequently means worthwhile savings. Check the sale prices against current prices for these items. Sometimes a “special” is an attention getter, not a bargain.



## **Be a Smart Shopper**

Know the nutritional needs of your family and what foods will fulfill these needs. Some foods give you more "food value" in return for your money than others. For example, many of the dark leafy green vegetables are exceptionally rich in vitamin A, and they furnish appreciable amounts of calcium, iron, riboflavin and vitamin C (when properly prepared for eating.) They are excellent buys when in season and low priced. Even when in short supply and more costly, they are economical sources of vitamin A because they provide so much of it. Broccoli is another green vegetable that gives us good returns in vitamins and minerals. Many of us count broccoli among the more expensive vegetables. When we look at its cost in light of the food value we are getting, though, broccoli is a much better buy than many vegetables that are low priced but give only small amounts of important nutrients.

### **Comparing Costs**

The correct way to make a true comparison of the cost of two foods is to compare the cost **per serving**. Price per pound or unit can be misleading. For example, a package of frozen peas weighs 12 ounces but contains four servings, while one pound (16 ounces) of fresh peas will give only two servings.

Compare cost per serving of a specific food in various forms (fresh, frozen, canned, dried). There are some differences in nutritive value of foods prepared in different ways, but usually the differences are small. This means we can buy the form that sells for less and still expect to get much the same food value. Which form will give the most for the money?

Make use of food marketing information via radio, television, newspaper, food store advertisements and others.

Be informed regarding the supply situation for different foods. Fresh foods "in season" usually wear lower price tags.

### **Read the Label**

When buying processed foods, look for information on the label which describes the food in the can or package. Price does not always indicate quality. The label is the "window" of the can or package and can be your guide to selecting the food best suited to your purpose.

Buy according to use. Top quality is not always necessary. Fancy whole green beans might do

very nicely for salad, but cut beans would be equally satisfactory in stew.

Use judgment in selecting convenience foods. Consider how much service you want to pay for. Compare flavor, quality, and time saved in using ready prepared foods and those you prepare yourself. Consider use of your time. Sometimes built-in services cost less—or they may be well worth extra cost in time saved or in better results.

Buy staples in quantities that best suit your size family. Lower prices are frequently offered on quantity purchases. Large sizes usually give more value per ounce of food than smaller containers providing you can store and use that quantity of food. Figure the cost per serving to determine the best buy.

*Adapted in part from Family Food Guide, Department of Public Health, State of Illinois and Food For Fitness, USDA Leaflet 424.*

This is No. 1 in the series "Market Basket Mastery." Others in this series:

2. Buying Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
3. Buying Canned and Specialty Foods
4. Buying Meat
5. Buying Convenience Foods

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