

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Make the Most of Your Grocery Shopping”

Before heading to the grocery store, take some time to plan your meals for the week. Review your work and family schedule to determine which meals are easiest to prepare on busy nights and which ones you can spend more time cooking. Once your weekly menu is set, check your fridge and pantry for ingredients you already have. If a recipe makes more servings than your family will eat in one sitting, plan to incorporate leftovers into your weekly menu. Aim to include at least three MyPlate food groups (dairy, protein, fruits, vegetables, and grains) in each meal.

Once you’ve created your grocery list, stick to it! It’s easy to make impulse purchases, but consistently buying unplanned items can quickly inflate your grocery budget. A great way to avoid impulse shopping is to eat before heading to the store. To increase savings, choose generic brands when possible, staples like pasta, rice, and flour are often made with the same ingredients as name brands but cost a fraction of the price. Before finalizing your grocery list, check for coupons and sales to maximize your savings. Purchasing in-season produce is another smart way to cut costs. For example, buy watermelon and zucchini in the summer and butternut squash and apples in the fall. If you are buying in bulk, make sure the items have a long shelf life or that you will use them before they expire.

Proper food storage is key to minimizing waste and making the most of your groceries. The average family of four loses about \$1,500 per year due to wasted food. To prevent this, buy only what you need, especially perishable items. When unpacking groceries, put the food away in the correct location. Raw meat should be on the bottom shelf of the fridge to avoid cross-contamination, and fruits and vegetables should be stored separately. If you’re unsure whether a produce item should be refrigerated, consider where it was displayed at the store. If it is kept at room temperature, it can remain that way until it’s cut or cooked. Use the “first in, first out” method to ensure older food gets eaten before it expires. Keep condiments and preserved foods in the fridge door, as they can withstand slight temperature fluctuations. If you won’t use something before it spoils, freeze or preserve it for later. Your refrigerator should be set at 40°F and your freezer at 0°F or lower to maintain food safety. By planning ahead, making smart purchasing choices, and storing food properly, you can save money, reduce waste, and make grocery shopping more efficient.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.

Join Walk Kansas this year! Go solo or form a team to track your exercise minutes over eight weeks and complete a virtual trail across Kansas. The program runs from March 30 to May 24. Registration is now open. The top team members and individual with the most activity minutes each week will be entered in a drawing to win a free month of membership to The Gym. For more details or to sign up, contact the Greenwood County Extension Office or visit WalkKansas.org.