

GROCERY STORE TOURS

A Guide for Nutrition Educators



EFNEP
EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION
EDUCATION PROGRAM



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NC STATE
UNIVERSITY



North Carolina
Public Health



NORTH CAROLINA

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A Grocery Store Tour is a great way to reinforce food resource management skills learned through community nutrition education classes that helps participants stretch their food resources to feed their families throughout the month. The tour can also help participants see how they can use these skills to compare products and make healthy choices within their limited budget. This guide is designed to be used as part of a regular series of nutrition education classes, such as SNAP-Ed, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), Faithful Families Eating Smart and Moving More, or other community nutrition education programs. It's important to take time to plan your grocery store tour in advance in order to be sure that participants get the most from the tour experience. Before you get started with a grocery store tour, here are some things to consider:

WHO should come? We recommend grocery store tours be part of an existing nutrition education class, rather than a one-time activity. We have found that the tours work best when scheduled as part of a regular series of nutrition education classes, such as SNAP-Ed, EFNEP, Faithful Families, or other community nutrition education programs. Participants are more likely to attend the tours if they already know you and are a part of an ongoing class series. This also gives you the chance to integrate activities to prepare participants for the grocery store tour throughout the series of classes so that participants are prepared to apply what they have learned during the tour.

WHAT should you cover? Include comparison shopping and unit pricing for every department in the grocery store. Practice label reading skills. Challenge participants to compete for who can plan a menu featuring all the foods represented on MyPlate at the lowest cost. Help participants weigh foods to visualize how much a pound

really is. Compare the costs between whole produce, pre-sliced, frozen, and canned. Look to see if the grocery is connected to local foods. Learn how to call on the skills of the meat cutter to save money on meats. Before finalizing your plans, ask your group what they are interested in learning. What part of the grocery store is the most confusing?

WHERE do you host the tour? Look for a location that is convenient to where your participants live. Some grocery stores do not allow tours. Others need approval from corporate headquarters before approving a tour. This can take several weeks, so planning the location before the series begins is hugely important to the success. Consider a location that is on the bus route, or if this is not an option, talk with your program partner about transportation of participants to the tour. Even when you choose a location near where participants live, it is likely that some participants will need transportation.

WHEN to host the tour? In setting up the tour with the grocery store, talk with the manager of the store to determine a day and time that does not conflict with in-store activities of staff, and avoids a high customer volume. Ask if the produce and meat department managers will be available to talk with participants. Once the date and time have been established, be sure to check online and in the circulars for store specials on the day of the tour. Consider asking your FCS Agent to help with the tour.

WHY hold a tour? A grocery store tour is a good way to help participants discover that eating healthy is possible on a limited budget. It gives participants an opportunity to ask questions that help them determine the best buys for their family and provides a real-life guided practice in which they can apply new food resource management skills in a learning environment. Mastering these skills can help them keep their families food secure.



Find local partners

Grocery store tours work well when they are a collaboration of several local partners.

Extension Volunteers and Participants:

Prior to the tour, ask participants if they are interested in a coupon swap. Ask Extension Volunteers to support the project by bringing in any coupons they have that they will not use. Use coupons to demonstrate good deals and bad when using coupons.

Grocery store management team,

including Corporate Administration, General Manager, Assistant Managers, Produce Department Manager, and Meat Department Manager: Discuss your tour with each team member. Determine if they can participate on the day of the tour.

Other Nutrition Education Programs:

SNAP-Ed programs may support a tour by working with a grocery store to offer more local foods. Other partnerships may offer additional resources for your participants such as reusable grocery bags or grocery gift cards

County Transportation Department:

Special arrangements can sometimes be made available for educational opportunities.

Family and Consumer Science Agent

can help with coordinating the tour and if store permits, can conduct food demonstration on-site during tour.

Take a trip through the grocery store to learn a few tips about making healthy food and drink choices. Visit NC EFNEP's Aisle by Aisle at:

www.myeatsmartmovemore.com/AisleByAisle.html

Once you have a team on board to work with you on the grocery store tour, talk through the questions above, including the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* questions. As your team makes a plan, you might work through the following TEN steps to implement your tour:

1. Think about how to integrate the tour into your regular class series.

Although food resource management and healthy choices are taught in every lesson, some lessons focus on these skills. Grocery store tours should occur after the following lessons have been taught: *Plan: Know What's for Dinner*; *Shop: Get the Best for Less*; and *Shop for Value, Check the Facts*.

2. Locate the grocery where you will host the tour. Choose the grocery where you will conduct the tour with care. High-end stores may offer a lot of variety, but prices are often higher as well. Choose a store that is accessible to your audience both in pricing and in location.

3. Find out what the store specials are for the day of your tour. Prior to the tour, scan the store website to see the regular rotation for double coupons. Pick up a store flyer for each of your participants a few days ahead. Use the flyer to select one in-season fruit or vegetable and one out-of-season fruit or vegetable to compare fresh, frozen, and canned versions for best price. Look for the best deal for cost per unit. Also, be prepared to share what items are used as "loss leaders" as these are often not the healthiest choices.

4. Talk with the store manager about the tour. Discuss the tour in detail with the store manager and secure their permission to involve other staff during the tour. Share the number of participants coming to the tour (Limit to no more than 12) and the names of any volunteers or partners that will be helping. Confirm date and time. Talk about the activities planned for each department and confirm that store manager is in agreement. Complete official request for tour through Corporate Administration if required.

5. Visit the grocery store. Tours run more smoothly when you are familiar with the store. Visit the store to familiarize yourself with the layout. As you do, identify learning opportunities for your participants in every department. You may want to plan a portion of the tour as a product comparison scavenger hunt. If so, a visit to the store will help you identify specific items you want to include that reinforce learning.

6. Plan the tour, working with your partners. When planning the tour, work with local partners who can contribute to the overall experience for your participants. Your FCS Agent can help you adapt recipes to use store specials in your next food demonstration. You may even be able to work with the store manager to have the FCS Agent prepare the recipe on-site in the store. Trained program volunteers can help you divide the group into smaller groups. This allows participants more individual attention during the tour and makes asking and responding to questions easier. Connect with Cooking Matters at the Store for potential partners already trained in conducting grocery store tours. You may even be able to secure resources such as reusable shopping bags or grocery store gift cards through partnerships. Share your plans for the tour with each department manager after receiving permission from the store manager. Ask if they have additional information they think is important to share. Secure the names of staff scheduled in each department on the day and time of the tour who are identified to work with you during the tour.

7. Teach your lessons! In the classes that lead up to the grocery store tour, be sure to let participants know that you will be taking a tour as part of the series. As you share food resource management and healthy choice concepts, remind participants that they will have the opportunity to see how to apply these concepts during the tour. Encourage participants that the tour will be an opportunity to ask questions they may have had, but never had the chance to ask. Prepare participants for the time frame of the tour. The minimum amount of time for conducting a good tour is about 2 hours. This may be longer than your typical time frame. It may also need to be on a different day from your regular class day. Share arrangements for transportation.

8. Carry out the tour. Work with store and community partners to conduct the tour. Provide participants with store flyers and point out any specials that will be highlighted during the tour. Use planned comparisons to highlight best buys and comparisons in each department of the grocery store. If participants are allowed in the meat cutting room, be sure they follow the sanitation requirements during the tour. Ask the meat cutter to share their personal tips for getting the best buy on meat. End the tour with either a scavenger hunt or a challenge that allows participants to apply their skills independently. Provide calculators, pens, shopping pads, and any handouts you have created for the independent practice. Establish an end time and a place for participants to meet back following the activity. End the tour by thanking the store manager. Walk outside the store as a group and allow each participant to share something new they learned during the tour. Challenge participants to use these skills and track their money savings during the upcoming weeks in your series. During the following class, ask participants to sign a thank you card addressed to the grocery store staff who helped with the tour. Continue to ask participants during each of the subsequent classes how they are using what they learned.

9. Cook using grocery items on special.

If approved by the store, ask FCS Agent to do an on-site cooking demonstration featuring at least one of the best buys highlighted during the tour. In subsequent weeks, talk about best buys and comparisons you made while shopping for ingredients to complete the food preparation in each class remaining in the series. This will continue to help reinforce the skills participants learned.

10. Celebrate your success! Ask grocery store manager if photos of the tour are allowed. If so, and if your participants have signed a waiver, take photos of participants learning from you, a staff member of the store, or a volunteer. During your graduation celebration, you can make a slide show of some of the photos you take to remind participants of everything they learned and the fun they had together.

REMEMBER: Consider location and transportation when deciding whether or not to include a grocery store tour as part of a series. Do the participants have access to transportation to the grocery store? Will the partnering agency provide transportation? Is the grocery store on the public transportation route? Is the grocery store close to their neighborhood or home?



Two North Carolina curricula, EFNEP's *Families Eating Smart and Moving More* and *Faithful Families*, include Food Resource Management tips in each lesson to help you emphasize the importance of messages around healthy, affordable food. These messages are great teaching tools to help set the stage for the tour and reinforce new skills following the tour.

Tips for your tour

Here are some ideas for activities and tips that other nutrition educators have included in their grocery store tours. These tips include general tips for your tour as well as tips specific to each department in a grocery store. You will not be able to cover all of these elements in one tour! However, you can select a few that fit the needs and interests of your class participants.

General Tips

Ideally, it is best to conduct a grocery store tour without children present, however, we know from experience that this is not always possible. If children will be present during a tour, limit the tour to a much smaller number of participants (6) and recruit additional volunteers to help. Engage children in the tour by asking them to look for a fruit or vegetable they haven't tried before or share healthy choices. Provide children with picture cards of fruits, vegetables, and healthy choices to help them feel part of the tour.

Talk with participants about food safety when shopping.

With approval from the store, ask your FCS Agent to prepare an EFNEP recipe from the cookbook using some of the best buys you are highlighting during the tour. Post the flyer at the demonstration area. In addition to your participants, the FCS Agent will need to prepare to complete the demonstration for store guests that come in during the timeframe of the tour as well. Prepare recipe cards for distribution that include information about your program. Provide FCS Agent with a poster advertising any upcoming classes in the area.

Ask the store manager if their grocery store has a rewards program, and if so, ask if a staff member can explain how their rewards program works. For participants who do not have a rewards card, ask for how they can sign up to receive rewards. Ask the store manager to identify the store brand.

Produce

While in the produce section remind participants that MyPlate encourages us to make half our plate fruits and vegetables. Point out any in-season and local produce. Provide participants with a seasonality chart from your area as a reference. Stress the need for menu planning to assure that produce is used before it spoils. Discuss freezing produce when fresh is at a particularly good price. Using the current store sales ad, share that most of the produce that is in-season is also on sale. Prepare to show a comparison between fresh, frozen, and canned for a fruit or vegetable that is in-season and one that is not. Compare the cost of purchasing whole versus pre-cut produce. An easy way to do this is to weigh one head of lettuce and then show participants how many bags of pre-washed lettuce they would need to buy to equal the weight of the whole head. Have participants compare cost to see which is the better buy.

Bread

While in the bread aisle, help participants use label reading skills to identify whole grains. Remind participants that they should strive to make at least half of their grains whole each day. Read labels to compare number of servings per loaf and nutrition. Check calories per serving of different brands. Bread products are also found in the freezer section, but most frozen bread products will have added calories and fat. Have participants do a few cost comparisons and share. Remind them that if there is a particularly good buy on bread, they could buy one loaf for now and another to freeze for later.

Meat and Seafood

While in the meat and seafood department, remind participants to choose lean cuts of meat for better health. Hold up a package of meat and talk about the number of servings they can expect to get from the package. Remind participants that a serving size is three ounces. Look at the current meat specials advertised in the store flyer. Compare the cost per serving between a whole chicken and pre-cut chicken tenders. Talk about seafood options that are good buys. The meat department manager can show participants where the leanest cuts of beef are located on the animal. The manager can also talk about utilizing the services of the meat cutter

at the grocery when a larger cut is on special to save even more money. If possible, ask the meat manager to demonstrate the difference in cost of the various cuts already portioned and packaged and in those cut from a larger cut of meat on special.

Dairy

The dairy section is a good place to talk about the cost comparison between name brands and store brands. Point out the sell-by dates on milk and use by dates on yogurt. Remind participants of the servings needed per day from the dairy group. Share that the foods in the dairy section of the grocery store may or may not be part of the dairy group on MyPlate. We primarily need dairy foods for calcium. Choose a few items (including milk substitutes) and ask participants to read the labels for calcium content. Compare the cost between block cheese and pre-shredded cheese. Ask participants to compare the cost per serving if purchasing a large container of yogurt versus a package of individual servings size containers. Remind participants that flavored yogurts often have added sugar.

Frozen

In the frozen foods section, try including a simple comparison to demonstrate how to cut costs at the grocery store. Ask participants to bring their recipe for Easy Lasagna that they received from the lesson, Shop for Value, Check the Facts. Bring copies of the recipe for Oven Fries (Eating Smart when Eating Fast Food or page 6 in the cookbook) with you as well. Using the Easy Lasagna recipe, show participants how to compare the nutrition facts between frozen lasagna and Easy Lasagna. Point out the time it takes to prepare the frozen lasagna versus the Easy Lasagna. Finally, calculate the cost per serving based on the best current prices in the grocery store. Challenge participants to do the same comparisons between frozen French fries and the Oven Fries recipe. Remind participants to always compare the cost between name brands and store brands and to look for store specials on frozen fruits and vegetables without added salt, sugar, or sauces. Remind participants to always consider their storage space when purchasing frozen foods.

Canned Foods

Canned foods can be a healthy part of a diet using a few simple tips. This is also where you may find some of the best buys by looking for opportunities to combine store specials with coupons. Compare the cost between name brands and store brands. Check the nutrition facts label. Choose vegetables low in sodium and fruits packed in their own juice. Encourage participants to compare the cost per serving of canned beans to the cost per serving of dried beans. Canned foods have a long shelf life. Stock up on healthy canned fruits and vegetables when there is a good buy. Share with your participants that this assures that they can always make half their plate fruits and vegetables.

Cereals and Snacks

These two aisles are a great place to remind your participants of portion control. Have participants check the nutrition facts on different products for the serving size. Ask what happens if they eat more than one serving. Look for whole grain products low in sodium and sugar. Have participants compare the cost and nutrition of a box of individual serving packets of oatmeal to a large container of oatmeal. Ask participants to share money saving tips they have.





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