

... MARCH 2009 ...

QUICK TAKES



BALANCING HEALTH AND BUDGET

Many shoppers find the prices at healthy food markets – at least for some items – to be too high. Here are some strategies:

- **Look for house brands.** House brands—those with a supermarket’s private label—used to be seen as lesser-quality versions of their national brand counterparts. But house brands at many of today’s new supermarkets can offer high quality at more competitive prices.
- **Buy in bulk.** More and more supermarkets have installed self-serve bins stocked with nuts, dried fruits, grains and other staple items. These are often better deals as you aren’t paying for packaging.
- **Buy local.** Many supermarkets feature locally grown produce and locally raised meats. Plus, there are more and more farmers’ markets every year. Locally grown, in-season foods are often cheaper because they’re abundant and haven’t been shipped long distances. They’re also better for the environment.

A Guide to Organic Supermarkets

In recent years, new supermarket chains emphasizing natural, healthier options have become popular. And while the variety - and in some cases the prices - can be intimidating, these stores have a lot to offer if you’re trying to improve your food choices. Learn how you can take advantage – without breaking the bank.

PRODUCE

The produce department is the supermarket’s showcase. Natural foods stores like Whole Foods set out a huge display of top-quality fruits and vegetables, featuring organic and often locally grown produce. Most other large supermarkets have followed suit.

Unfortunately, the larger range of options often comes at a higher cost. If organic prices are too high for you, remember you are still far better off eating conventionally grown produce than eating none at all.

GRAINS, CEREALS AND SNACKS

The big change in these categories is the expansion of the number of products made with whole grains and without hydrogenated oils and trans fat. The best value and some of the greatest variety can be found with house brands. Try these tips:

- **Cold Cereals:** Get your fiber in the morning! Shoot for 5 grams a serving, but no less than 3. Limit fat to 3 grams and be conscious of the sugars. Healthy-sounding cereals can still have substantial amounts of added sugar.
- **Breads:** Look for brands where each serving provides 3 grams of dietary fiber (no less than 2).
- **Pasta, Couscous, Rice & Other Grains:** Look for brands where each serving provides 5 grams of dietary fiber (no less than 3).
- **Crackers:** Once again, fiber is key; keep fat, especially trans fat, to a minimum. Select crackers with 3 grams of fiber per serving (no less than 2) and no hydrogenated oils.
- **Other Snacks:** Snack food used to equal junk food; good choices just weren’t available. That’s not the case anymore. There’s a great selection of products that are trans-fat-free and low in saturated fat.

DAIRY

Americans consume a lot of milk and dairy products; on average we consume more than 30 pounds of cheese per person per year. Too often those dairy foods are consumed in full-fat versions such as whole milk, full-fat cheeses or premium ice cream. Low-fat and fat-free versions of these foods are available at just about any supermarket – that’s nothing new. But many new supermarkets are now offering a greater variety of products that can make low-fat dairy options more appealing.

What about organic dairy? If you’re trying to decide whether to buy organic dairy products, it helps to understand exactly what the term means. In the United States, there are four requirements for dairy products to be labeled organic:

1. Cows may not have been treated with bovine somatotrophin (abbreviated as BGH, bST, BST or rBST) to increase milk production. But growth-hormone-free dairy products are not necessarily organic.
2. Organic cows may not have been treated with antibiotics.
3. Organic cows’ feed may not include pesticides.
4. Organic cows must have access to pasture.

A Guide to Organic Supermarkets (cont'd)

EGGS

Eggs don't just come in brown or white and jumbo, large or medium anymore. The labels, claims – and prices – can be confusing. The USDA allows producers to label for the following types:

- **Cage-free:** Hens kept out of cages, but can be indoors.
- **Free-range:** Hens must be out of cages and have access to the outdoors.
- **Organic:** Both cage-free, and free-range, cannot be given antibiotics and food must be free of animal by-products.
- **Vegetarian-fed:** Hens raised on vegetarian feed.
- **Omega-3s:** Hens given a diet of foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, which are seen as heart healthy.



MEAT AND SEAFOOD

As supermarkets grew in popularity, small butchers and fish stores gave way to specialized departments within supermarkets. While this is an added convenience, some feel it came at the expense of quality and service. But new supermarkets are making an effort to recreate the small-market experience with their deli, meat and seafood departments.

Organic meats, which are now available in many supermarket chains, are not only free of antibiotics

and growth hormones, but the feed must be free of pesticides, and may not be genetically modified.

When choosing fish remember that the fattiest fish will always be leaner than the leanest meat. There are a range of factors that can influence decisions on buying fish, from freshness to mercury levels to sustainability. And, of course, price. Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. What are the standards? In recent years, supermarket chains such as Wegmans have announced new standards for their seafood purchases. Fish and shellfish, including salmon and shrimp, must be from environmentally sustainable fisheries and not exceed strict limits on contaminant levels.

2. Where is it from? Usually the seafood department manager will be able to tell you where the fish is from. A handful of supermarkets including Whole Foods, Wal-Mart, Target and Costco carry seafood with the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label, a program designed to recognize and reward sustainable fishing.

3. What if I hate to cook fish? Then buy it already prepared! Many new supermarkets have dozens of flavorful frozen fish options. Just make sure that saturated fat is no more than 3 grams per serving and avoid trans fats.

Easy Puttanesca Sauce

Takes under 30 minutes | Makes: 4 Servings

Roasted red peppers in a jar are a great convenience food. Keep a couple of jars on hand for quick homemade meals. Serve this robust sauce over whole-grain pasta mixed with cooked shrimp or cannellini beans.

Ingredients

- 1 26-ounce (780 g) jar spaghetti sauce, such as Trader Joe's No-Salt-Added Marinara
- ¾ cup (6 oz/180 g) chopped roasted red peppers
- 6 green olives, sliced
- 2 teaspoons capers, rinsed and drained
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 or 2 pinches crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Preparation

1. In a large saucepan, heat spaghetti sauce over medium heat. Stir in chopped peppers, olives, capers, garlic and red pepper flakes. Simmer for 5 minutes to blend flavors.
2. Shortly before serving, stir in parsley.

Nutritional info / serving

96 Calories
0.8g Fat
0g Saturated fat
4.0g Protein
19g Carbohydrate
3.0g Fiber
621mg Sodium



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