Grocery Shopping Made Easier

Listen to theCancer.Net Podcast: Grocery Shopping Made Easier[1], adapted from this content.

Eating well is important for people living with cancer. It can improve your overall health and well-being and help you have more energy and feel less fatigued. However, deciding what to eat, shopping for groceries, and preparing your food often takes a lot of time and energy. Here are some basic steps that can make meal planning and grocery shopping a little easier.

Step 1: Figuring out what to eat

Cancer and cancer treatments may cause you to lose your appetite [2] and may affect the way your body uses the nutrients found in food. In addition, side effects from cancer treatment, such as nausea and vomiting [3], dry mouth [4], and mouth sores [5], can make eating healthy even more difficult.

People with cancer are encouraged to talk with their doctors, nurses, and other health care team members about what to eat. Your doctor may recommend that you talk with a food and nutrition specialist [6], such as a registered dietitian (RD) or nutritionist, who will help you create an eating plan that?s right for you. For example, many people with cancer often need to focus on getting enough calories and protein, as well as other nutrients like vitamins and carbohydrates. Your health care team can help you figure out what foods you should be eating and help you plan simple, nutritious menus to meet your needs.

Step 2: Planning what to buy

Once you know what you should be eating, you can plan what to buy at the grocery store.

- Make a list of basic items that appear most often in the meals you have developed with your health care team. These are items you want to have on-hand in your kitchen in order to make quick, simple meals. These food items may include yogurt, eggs, whole wheat pasta, frozen vegetables, frozen berries, canned salmon, and canned beans, along with your favorite snacks.
- Think about which healthy foods appeal to you. Having a variety of these foods on-hand can help you cope with changes in your appetite and tastes. However, plan to buy these in small quantities if possible. Food that is appealing one day may not be the next day, and your food preferences may change frequently throughout cancer treatment.
- Consider stocking up on frozen entrees or prepackaged meals (like stir-fry or crock-pot meals) for times you don?t feel like cooking. A variety of healthy options are available in most stores. Many markets also sell freshly prepared entrees and side dishes that only need reheating at home.

Step 3: Writing a shopping list

While writing a list for each store visit may seem like extra work, it can actually save you time and energy. A good list can save you from walking around the store looking for items you missed or from going back to the store for things you forgot. The following tips may help you write your list:

- As you use up items in your kitchen, write them on your grocery list right away so you remember to buy more. This can be done on a notepad in your kitchen, such as a magnetized one placed on the side of your refrigerator. Or, if you prefer using a smartphone or tablet, there are several apps for this purpose (search for ?grocery list app? in your device?s online store).
- Make a basic outline of the meals and snacks you plan to eat for the next several days or a week at a time, depending on how often you shop. Review the recipes you plan to use and check to see which ingredients you already have. Add the ingredients you need to your list, as well as the amounts needed.
- When writing your list, group items into categories, such as fresh produce, dairy, canned goods, and frozen foods.
- If you are familiar with the store, arrange the items on your list so they follow the store?s layout. Mark items you don?t know the location of with a question mark or other notation to remind yourself to keep your eye out for them as you move through the store?s aisles.
- If you find there are items you buy every time you go to the store, consider keeping a basic grocery list on your computer, phone, or other device. This will save you time and energy when making your list before each time you shop.

Step 4: Going to the store

Trips to the grocery store can be tiring, but there are ways to make grocery shopping easier.

- Ask a friend, family member, or neighbor to go with you to the store. This person may be able to drive you there, help you find items, and carry the bags. This may be something you do often or only on those days when you feel particularly tired.
- Try shopping at the same store each time so you become familiar with the store?s layout. This will reduce the amount of energy you spend

walking around looking for items. Shopping at a smaller grocery store can also reduce the amount of walking around you have to do, although keep in mind that the food selection may be more limited.
- Most stores have a directory listing the locations of popular items. When you enter the store, ask for a copy of the directory from the customer service desk. Some grocery stores now offer computer kiosks around the store to help you locate items during your visit.
- If you can?t find something, ask for help rather than searching for it by yourself.
- Shop from your grocery list. Check off items as you go so you don?t forget anything.
- Park close to the store and use a cart rather than carrying a basket. Motorized carts with built-in seats are also available at many grocery stores.
- At the checkout, ask to have your bags packed lightly, and ask for help putting your bags into the car.
- Shop at less busy times, like mid-week and during the afternoon, to avoid standing in long lines.
- Take a break if you become tired. Many stores have chairs in the pharmacy department or near the entrance.

Shopping online and other options

Alternatives to regular grocery store shopping are becoming increasingly popular. Some of these options may cost more than traditional grocery stores, but the added convenience may be worth the extra cost to you. These options may also be cheaper than eating out when you don?t have the energy to shop or cook.

- Many grocery chains offer online grocery shopping. Customers can create, save, and update an online grocery list on the store?s website. Groceries are then delivered for a fee based on the amount purchased. Talk with the customer service desk at your favorite store or check the store?s website to see if it offers this service.
- Consider buying fresh fruits and vegetables at a local farmers market. Farmers markets offer fresh, local produce with less walking or waiting in line. The U.S. Department of Agriculture?s website [7] offers a state-by-state list of farmers markets.
- Meal assembly shops are stores where you can buy fresh, prepared ingredients for a week's worth of meals to heat and serve at home. To find such stores, search online using the phrase ?meal assembly.? In a related service trend, there are online retailers that sell prepared, frozen meals that are delivered to your home by express shipping. Try searching online for ?meal delivery.?
- It may be helpful to make a number of meals all at once on days when you have the most energy. Then you can heat them up throughout the week or freeze them to save for days when you don?t feel like cooking. That way you always have quick, healthy, home-cooked options available.
- Ask your friends and family members for help. Many times, people want to help but don?t know how. As noted above, this could be helping you at the grocery store, running out to the store for you, or preparing a simple meal to share together.

More Information

Nutrition Recommendations During and After Treatment [8]

Coping With Cancer-Related Fatigue [9]

Additional Resources

American Cancer Society: Basic Ingredients for a Healthy Kitchen [10] and Quick Entrees [11]

National Cancer Institute:Eating Hints: Before, During, and After Cancer Treatment[12]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/grocery_shopping_made_easier.mp3
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/25043
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/25052
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25047
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/25051
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24957
[7] http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/24985
[9] http://www.cancer.net/node/24490
[10] http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_3_2X_Shopping_List_Basic_Ingredients_For_A_Healthy_Kitchen.asp?sitearea=PED
[11] http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_3_2X_Quick_Entrees.asp?sitearea=PED
[12] http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/eatinghints