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Printed January 30, 2015 from <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/prevention-and-healthy-living/diet-and-nutrition/meal-planning-and-grocery-shopping>

## Meal Planning and Grocery Shopping [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 06/2014



*Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Grocery Shopping Made Easier\[3\]](#), adapted from this content.*

### Key Messages:

- Talk with your health care team about creating an individualized meal plan that provides the nutrition needed to improve your overall health.
- Creating an organized shopping list each time you go grocery shopping helps save time and energy.
- There are several other ways to make in-store grocery shopping less tiring, and alternatives such as online grocery shopping are available.

Eating well can improve the overall health and well-being of people living with cancer. However, deciding what to eat, shopping for groceries, and preparing food often take a lot of time and energy. Efficient meal planning and grocery shopping helps you get the nutrition you need with less effort.

### Meal planning

Cancer and cancer treatments may cause you to [lose your appetite \[4\]](#), affect the way your body uses the nutrients found in food, or cause other side effects like [nausea and vomiting \[5\]](#), [dry mouth \[6\]](#), and [mouth sores \[7\]](#) that make it difficult to maintain your weight. As a result, many people with cancer need to focus on getting enough calories and protein, as well as other nutrients like vitamins and carbohydrates.

People with cancer are encouraged to talk with their doctors, nurses, and other health care team members about what to eat. Your health care team may recommend that you talk with a food and nutrition professional, such as a registered dietitian/nutritionist (RDN), to help create a meal plan that is right for you. Meal planning is even more important if you already follow a special diet for another health condition, such as heart disease or diabetes.

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 your meal plan. These are items you want to have on-hand in your kitchen to make quick, simple meals. These food items may include yogurt, eggs, whole wheat pasta, frozen vegetables, frozen berries, canned salmon, and canned beans (such as kidney, garbanzo, and pinto beans), along with your favorite snacks, including trail mix, string cheese, and Greek yogurt.
- Think about which healthy foods appeal to you and keep a variety of them on hand. However, buy them in small quantities if possible since 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 do not 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.

## **Shopping lists**

A good shopping 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 do not know the location of with a question mark 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.

## **Grocery shopping**

Trips to the grocery store may 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 days you feel particularly tired.
- Shop 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 also reduces the amount of walking around you have to do, although

the food selection may be more limited.

- Most stores have a directory listing the locations of popular items. 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 cannot find something, ask for help rather than searching for it yourself.
- Shop from your grocery list. Check off items as you go so you do not 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.

### **Grocery 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 you may find the added convenience worth it. These options may also be cheaper than eating out when you do not have the energy to shop or cook.

- Many grocery chains offer online grocery shopping. Customers 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.
- 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." There are also online retailers that sell prepared, frozen meals that are delivered to your home by express shipping. Try searching online for "meal delivery."
- Make a number of healthy meals all at once on days when you have the most energy. Then you are able to heat them up throughout the week or freeze them to save for days when you do not feel like cooking.
- Ask your friends and family members for help. Many times, people want to help but do not know how. This could be running out to the store for you or preparing a simple meal to share together.

### **More Information**

[Nutrition Recommendations During and After Treatment \[8\]](#)

[General Nutrition Recommendations \[9\]](#)

[Fatigue \[10\]](#)

### **Additional Resources**

American Cancer Society: [Basic Ingredients for a Healthy Kitchen](#) [11] and [Quick Entrees](#) [12]

National Cancer Institute: [Eating Hints: Before, During, and After Cancer Treatment](#) [13]

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/prevention-and-healthy-living/diet-and-nutrition/meal-planning-and-grocery-shopping>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] [http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/grocery\\_shopping\\_made\\_easier.mp3](http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/grocery_shopping_made_easier.mp3)

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25043>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25052>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25047>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25051>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24985>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24984>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25048>

[11]

[http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_3\\_2X\\_Shopping\\_List\\_Basic\\_Ingredients\\_For\\_A\\_Healthy\\_Kitchen.asp?sitearea](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_3_2X_Shopping_List_Basic_Ingredients_For_A_Healthy_Kitchen.asp?sitearea)

[12] [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_3\\_2X\\_Quick\\_Entrees.asp?sitearea=PED](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_3_2X_Quick_Entrees.asp?sitearea=PED)

[13] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/eatinghints>