

Cardiac Rehabilitation: Heart Healthy Supermarket Tour

Making healthy food choices reduces your risk for heart disease. One place where you may find it difficult to make healthy choices is at the grocery store.

When you join a cardiac rehabilitation program, your cardiac care team can give you the tools you need to successfully navigate through the supermarket and fill your cart with heart healthy food choices.

The supermarket can be overwhelming, and it can be hard sometimes to tell if certain foods are healthy. It can be easy to buy the same foods week after week, even if they aren't healthy.

This is especially true if you are shopping on a budget and don't want to pay extra for foods with labels like "organic" or "all-natural."

Here are a few simple tips that you can keep in mind in any supermarket that will help you find your way to healthier food choices and real deals, good for your pocketbook as well as your heart health.

First, understanding the layout of the supermarket can help you cut down on impulse purchases that can be bad for both your wallet and your waistline.

Try to buy more foods from around the outside edges of the store. These are usually where the fresh foods are such as fruits and vegetables, lean meats, fish and chicken, as well as healthy dairy products, whole grains, and healthy frozen food options. While shopping the outside edges, choose healthier versions when you can.

For example, if a product is packaged, check the food label. Take a look at the sugar, fat and sodium levels and pick the healthiest option.

Use caution in the middle aisles of the store. These aisles usually contain highly processed foods with extra salt, sugar and fat.

The American Heart Association recommends up to 1500mg of sodium a day. In just one serving of canned soup there can be almost 1000mg or 1 gram! Select the lower sodium options.

Avoid highly processed foods which include canned, frozen boxed foods, or sauced foods. There are often high amounts of added sugar, salt, and unhealthy fat. Once again, check the food labels to help make your selections.

If you are shopping on a budget, keep in mind that throughout the store, the more expensive foods tend to be placed at eye level, with the less expensive versions down below.

Many people with heart disease have other diseases or health conditions.

Your healthcare provider or a dietitian may assist you with some suggestions to help you select foods, perhaps to learn to read a food label properly.

Don't be afraid to try new, healthy foods! There are often recipes or healthy cooking classes available at the store or on their website.

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Try to go to the supermarket when you have time to review what you are buying. Look at the different options to make a healthier choice. If you are in a rush, you may just put your usual unhealthy choice in your cart and regret it later.

And don't go to the supermarket hungry. When you're hungry everything can look like a good idea and be too tempting. Especially those old unhealthy favorites and the candy filled stands at the check-out line.

Going to the supermarket after a heart event or diagnosis can be overwhelming. You are trying to make heart healthy decisions and it can be confusing. Remember, when shopping, stick to the fresh non-packaged foods found on the outside edges of the store.

Go when you have time to use your tools – like the food label.

Don't go hungry.

And look for other helpful resources like recipes and cooking classes.

Your cardiac care team is happy to help answer any questions you may have about making healthy food choices in the grocery store. And with a little time this will become easier. You will be able to fill your cart with heart healthy foods that will lower your risk factors for future heart problems, and stick to your budget.