



Think You're Too Busy to Eat Healthy?

Quick Shopping & Cooking Tips for People on-the-Go

-- By Tanya Jolliffe, Healthy Eating Expert

Whether you're overworked or just plain overstressed, time is valuable to all of us. When making a lifestyle change, it can easily seem overwhelming to include new habits like exercise and healthy eating into your jam-packed days. Between everything else you've got going on, how are you also supposed to find time to prepare healthy meals and read all those labels in the grocery store? These tips will help you spend even less time in the grocery store, emerge with healthy ingredients, and cook diet-friendly meals in minutes, whether you're serving one, two or ten.

Time-Saving Grocery Shopping

Keeping a grocery list may seem like a waste of time in the moment, but it will actually save you time while shopping. While any old list is better than none, here are some tips that will turn your list into time well spent.

- 1. Keep a running list.** One of the best places to keep your grocery list is in the kitchen—on the fridge, on a bulletin or wipe board, or even on the pantry door. As you run out of items, add them to the list so you don't have to remember them later. Then when you're ready to shop, you'll have a complete shopping list ready to go with you.
- 2. Organize your list.** You can get through the store quickly if you organize your list in the same order that you typically navigate the grocery store. If you always start in the produce section, then start your list with these foods. If you hit the dairy section last, then add those foods to the bottom of the list. By listing items in order of the store layout, you can avoid retracing your steps to pick up things you missed.
- 3. Shop during "off" hours and days.** You can usually get in and out of the store more quickly if you shop between Sunday and Wednesday, later in the evenings, or during the middle of the day, such as your lunch hour.
- 4. Avoid shopping when you are hungry.** Studies show that when hungry people shop, they are more likely to purchase items that aren't on their lists. When your belly is growling, you're more likely to stray off of your list, notice other foods that you didn't come in to get, and spend extra money overall. Try shopping after a meal or a small snack to stay focused and on track.
- 5. Use caution with single-servings and bulk items.** Many times when you shop, the choice of individual or bulk sizes means the difference between time and money. Individual serving items (such as yogurt, instant oatmeal, 100-calorie packs, frozen entrees, etc.) and pre-cut foods (chopped veggies and fruits, whether frozen or fresh) tend to be more expensive than larger packages or bulk quantities, but they will save you time and help with portion control.

If money is of greater concern than time, select standard food packages (such as a tub of yogurt, a canister of oatmeal, a box of crackers, etc.). With just a few food storage containers of various sizes, you can portion out your snacks and meals for later convenience. It only takes a few minutes to prepare snacks and portions for a whole week, but you'll save lots of money in the end.

Healthy Meals in Minutes

Now that you have the ingredients on your list, here are some quick and healthy cooking ideas. These meals pack

fiber, veggies and protein into a quick-cooking (and flavorful) meal. Whether you're cooking for one or a family of four, you can adapt the quantities of ingredients to suit you.

- Lightly sauté fresh vegetables such as onions, mushrooms, peppers and eggplant and simmer with spaghetti sauce.
- Top frozen pizza with extra tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms, broccoli and onions.
- Add diced tomatoes, shredded carrots, raisins and pine nuts to quick-cooking brown rice or couscous. Season with a dash of balsamic vinegar.
- Add canned and rinsed black-eyed peas, thawed and drained okra, diced tomato and sliced green onion to reduced-sodium tomato soup.
- Stir-fry chopped vegetables and serve with rice and beans.
- For breakfast, top a cinnamon raisin bagel with light cream cheese and apple slices.
- Heat fat-free refried beans in the microwave. Add veggies and salsa and roll the mixture in a tortilla.
- Add frozen corn, steamed and diced green and red bell peppers and cilantro to a can of reduced-sodium black bean soup.
- Stir-fry cooked rice, chopped vegetables and leftover meat with low-sodium soy sauce.
- Add grapes, chopped celery, walnuts and dried cherries or golden raisins to pre-washed salad greens; toss with your favorite low-fat dressing.
- In the morning, place chicken, vegetables, broth and spices to your liking into the Crockpot to come home to a wonderful stew that evening.
- Top a baked potato with nonfat yogurt, barbeque sauce, low-fat cottage cheese, chives, sautéed onions and vegetables or chili for a super spud!
- Add canned or fresh fruit to muffins, quick breads, pancake batter, or cold cereal.
- Puree fruit and top your pancakes, waffles, oatmeal or roasted chicken.
- Marinate raw or cooked veggies in a non-fat Italian dressing for a quick, cold salad.

For more quick and healthy meal ideas, check out SparkRecipes.com.

Getting healthy doesn't have to be time-consuming or expensive. With a little planning and a few meal ideas, you can easily find the time to make nutritious, home-cooked meals that you and your family will love.