SMARTER LIVING
CONSUMER

SUPERMARKET SHOPPING STRATEGIES

ANDREA GREANEY, at center, discusses the nutritional content of canned vegetables with Marietta Williams of Hartford. Greaney is one of the Health & Nutrition coordinators for the Community Renewal Team, which was offering a program called Shopping Matters for National Nutrition Month.

SMART FOOD
How To Get The Most Nutritional Items At The Best Price

By LINDA GIUCA | Special To The Courant

S
aving money at the supermarket begins at home. Long before stepping foot in the grocery store, the smart shopper peruses the pantry, checks the supermarket circulars for the sales and plans the week’s meals. Only then—armed with a list—should the shopping begin.

Dietitians offered this advice—with a helpful twist—during a recent Shopping Matters tour at ShopRite supermarket in West Hartford. The diet and health professionals also showed the group of six women how to get the most nutritional bang for the buck.

“It’s important to know how to extend your food dollar but eat healthy!” said Kristie Spedding, a registered dietitian and health and nutrition director for the Community Renewal Team’s Early Care and Education Health and Nutrition Department in Hartford.

Registered dietitian Angie Corcoran, the health and wellness coordinator for ShopRite’s West Hartford and Canton stores, recommended the 80/20 shopping rule.

“Set aside 80 percent of your budget for healthful foods,” she said, “and leave 20 percent for processed or snack foods.”

CJRT’S nutrition team partnered with ShopRite to offer the tour to parents whose children are enrolled in CJRT’s early childhood education programs. Through a grant from Share Our Strength, a nonprofit organization working to stamp out childhood hunger, the health professionals conducted the tour and gave participants a gift card to put their new shopping tips to practical use.

CJRT sponsored four supermarket tours, reaching 26 parents in March, which was National Nutrition Month. The agency also sponsored 16 nutrition-themed presentations for about 360 parents and children’s nutrition lessons that reached more than 1,000 pre-school children.

Before the group walked the aisles, Corcoran broke down the rules for saving money. Start with the weekly newspaper circular to find coupons, sales and special promotions, said the dietitian who oversees culinary workshops and is available for one-on-one nutrition counseling sessions with shoppers at the stores. She also pointed out that store brands save money. “The quality is great but you don’t have to pay for the marketing of the national brands,” she said. “Even with coupons for the national brands, the store brand is usually cheaper.”

While touring the market with the group, the dietitians linked shopping tips and information to two key themes: unit pricing and nutrition labeling. “Unit pricing is a very important skill to teach,” Corcoran said, “and when [shoppers] understand it, they’ll use it.”

The women on the tour agreed, saying the added sugar and salt content. A can of no-salt-added tomatoes contains about 20 milligrams of sodium, while the salt-added variety has 225 milligrams sodium. If you have a family that has salt problems, this is where you have to pay attention,” Greaney said. Rinsing a salt-added canned vegetable can reduce up to 30 percent of the sodium content, Spedding said.

Cost cuts further with a do-it-yourself approach. The unit price of a box of peeled baby carrots was $1.69 per pound, while a 5-pound bag of whole, unpeeled carrots weighed in at 69 cents per pound. “If you are willing to take a little extra time to cut up the carrots yourself, the 5-pound bag is significantly cheaper to buy,” Spedding said.

The darker or more vibrant the color of a fruit or vegetable, the more nutrients it contains, Spedding said. Think of dark leafy greens such as collards or spinach versus cabbage or iceberg lettuce. Even the red skin of a new potato has more antioxidants than the skin of an Idaho or Russet baking potato, Greaney said. A check of potato prices found sweet potatoes the same $1.29 per pound as baking potatoes, but yams are a better source of vitamin A.

> Shoppers who don’t have a butcher’s knowledge of cuts of meat can make lower-fat selections by eye. Look at the marbling—the “vein” of fat running through the meat—in beef or pork, the dietitians said. The more marbling, the higher the fat content.

> Fruit juice drinks are another category that bears careful label reading. Look for “100 percent juice,” and be aware that the recommended amount of juice for a child is one-half cup a day. “That’s not a lot of juice,” Spedding said. “If your child loves juice, then add water to thin it out.”

> In bland beverages, the amount of real juice will be stated above the nutrition information label. Some of these colorful “juice” drinks contain no juice. They may be cheaper, but they may not be healthy, said Spedding. “They’re buying food coloring, sugar and water mixed together.”

> For more information about the West Hartford ShopRite, call the ShopRite stores’ Live Right wellness programs, visit www.shoprite.com/wellness, or call Dietitian Angie Corcoran, call the West Hartford store at 860-233-973 or the Canton store at 860-693-3666.