

## SUPERMARKET SHOPPING STRATEGIES



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COMMUNITY RENEWAL TEAM

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 — and armed with a list — should the shopping begin.

Dietitians offered this advice — with a healthful 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 Kittie 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."

CRT's nutrition team partnered with

ShopRite to offer the tour to parents whose children are enrolled in CRT's early childhood education programs. Through a grant from Share Our Strength, a nonprofit organization working to stamp out childhood hunger, the health professionals



COURTESY OF THE COMMUNITY RENEWAL TEAM  
Renee Moore, left, and her friend Danette Wilson compare nutritional content labels at the West Hartford ShopRite.

conducted the tour and gave participants a gift card to put their new shopping tips to practical use.

CRT sponsored four supermarket tours, reaching 26 parents, in March, which was National Nutrition Month. The agency also sponsored 16 nutrition-themed presentations for about 160 parents and children's nutrition lessons that reached more than 1,000 pre-school children.

Before the group walked the aisles, Corcoran suggested general ideas 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

## Nutrition

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that the lesson on how to use unit pricing was the most valuable aspect of the workshop.

Unit pricing will determine the best buy — and it may not always be the product that is on sale. Reading both the ingredient list and the nutrition information can lead to more healthful food choices. Building on those themes, the dietitians offered these shopping tips:

► When shopping for bread, crackers, cereal, pasta or rice, "whole [grain] is the key," Andrea Greaney, a CRT health and nutrition coordinator who helped with the tour. Look beyond buzzwords such as "wheat" on the front of the package. The first item in the ingredient list should be a whole grain such as 100 percent whole wheat. "White" bread is generally cheaper than whole grains but contains less than half of the fiber per slice. In this case, "it's worth it to spend a little extra money to give the kids the nutrients they need," Greaney said.

The dietary guidelines recommend that half of our grains for the day should be whole grains," Spedding said. "If your family doesn't like whole grains, it's not necessary to serve them every time. You can serve a whole-grain cereal for breakfast, whole-grain bread at lunch and white rice, if the family doesn't like brown rice, at dinner." If the family resists whole grains, introduce them gradually or try mixing whole wheat pasta and white pasta or brown and white rice.

► In the produce department, buy what is in season for the best value and nutrition. Use the unit price to compare costs among fresh varieties and against canned or frozen. "Fresh, frozen or canned, which is best?" Spedding asked the group. "It's all about getting those vitamins and minerals."

The group found fresh peaches for \$2.49 a pound and fresh Bartlett pears on sale for 99 cents a pound. Comparing prices in the canned food aisle, "canned peaches [at \$1.43 per pound unit price] are a better buy this week," Spedding said, but the reverse was true of pears. At \$1.27 per pound unit price for canned pears, the fresh pears on sale were the better value.

► When buying canned vegetables and fruit, read labels to determine

the added sugar and salt content. A can of no salt-added tomatoes contains about 20 milligrams of sodium, while the salt-added variety listed 220 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 in water can reduce up to 30 percent of the sodium content, Spedding said.

► Cut costs further with a do-it-yourself approach. The unit price of a bag 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 price 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 "veins" 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 blended 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," Spedding says, but "you're buying food coloring, sugar and water mixed together."

► For more information about the West Hartford and Canton ShopRite stores' Live Right wellness programs, visit [www.shoprite.com/wellness.aspx](http://www.shoprite.com/wellness.aspx). To reach dietitian Angie Corcoran, call the West Hartford store at 860-233-1713 or the Canton store at 860-693-3666.