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website: http://www.nasoceana.navy.mil

Shopping solutions for healthy eating

Military families have many choices when it comes to food, especially when shopping at the commissary. With more than 30,000 items and numerous brand names, how do you select foods that are enjoyable, affordable and provide proper nutrition?

Here are some grocery shopping solutions to help select the most nutritious food options in all aisles of the store easily and quickly.

The Grocery List

Before you visit the commissary, make a grocery list. It will save you time, money and headaches. Your grocery list will greatly depend on your weekly schedule. How busy are you and your family? If you are a family on the go, you can eat both healthy and quickly with proper planning. For example, if you are going to plan for pizza one night, shop for salad and fruit to balance the meal. In addition, a sandwich made with high fiber whole grain bread, lean cuts of meat, low-fat cheese and vegetables is another healthy "on the go" food option.

If you are going to cook meals, check your menu options against the Food Guide Pyramid to ensure you've remembered everything from poultry to produce. This will help ensure you are purchasing a variety of foods that provide all of your nutrient needs. With its five food groups, the Pyramid has many kinds of foods that promote health. Chosen carefully, all foods can be part of your healthful eating style. To learn more about the Food Guide Pyramid, visit www.schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/py/pmap.htm

Encourage your family to help make the grocery list and prepare dinner. That way, everyone can select his or her favorite fruit and vegetables. By involving your kids, they'll be more likely to eat healthy foods, and they'll learn the basics of eating right.

The Strategy

Don't go grocery shopping when you are hungry. Leave the decisions to your head, not your stomach. It's easier to stick to the list if you are not hungry, so plan to make sure to eat something before you go.

Photos by PH3 Jennifer Simonds

Diane Mahiai and daughter Pamela enjoy choosing from the wealth of fresh fruits and vegetables offered at the Naval Air Station Oceana Commissary.

Focus on foods located near the walls of the commissary. Usually the freshest foods and those with the least amount of preservatives and artificial flavorings are located near the walls of the commissary. Fruits, vegetables, fresh meats, dairy products and breads are among the most common foods located on the outside portion of the grocery store. High preservative foods such as frozen dinners, pizzas, waffles, etc. have a greater amount of artificial flavorings and preservatives.

Set a Routine

Establish a day and time that makes it easy for you to move quickly and easily through the store and stay focused on your shopping needs.

The Labels

The food label can be a consumer's best shopping tool. You can compare nutrients and ingredients between similar products, determine which nutrients the food contributes to your total diet, safe preparation methods and much more.

If you want to learn more about reading nutrition facts and other items on the food label, find more information at American Dietetic Association's website at www.eatright.org.

Lon McKinnon shops for fresh vegetables at the Oceana Commissary. Healthy eating is important for people of all ages.