

Shopping Beyond the Perimeter

For years, dietitians and health professionals have been promoting one method of food shopping — “shopping the perimeter” — as a way to help you choose foods that support a healthy diet. Most markets keep their fresh foods on the outside aisles of the store; fruits and vegetables, dairy, meats, and fish can all be found there. These foods are certainly the mainstays of a healthy diet, but if you are only shopping the periphery, you are missing out on some key nutrients in items that reside within the middle of the store. Let’s check out some of these nutrient-dense gems that you will find beyond the perimeter.

Bread and Grains Aisles

Grain-based foods contain fiber, as well as vitamins and minerals that may not be in fruits and vegetables. Although there are lots of loaves to choose from, look for breads that contain 100% whole grains and no high fructose corn syrup. When shopping for grains, make at least half of your grains whole. Whole grains include whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, bulgur, amaranth and barley. If you are looking for whole gluten-free grains, try quinoa, buckwheat, corn, and oats.

Canned and Dried Goods Aisles

Although it is best to buy your fruits and vegetables fresh, if you skip the canned and dried foods section, you will miss out on an important protein source – beans! Beans can be purchased dry or canned, but if you buy dried beans, be prepared to soak them for a

number of hours before using them in a recipe. Canned beans come ready to eat, but they can be high in sodium. Rinsing them before adding them to a salad or chili will help reduce the sodium, or look for a low-sodium option.

Nuts and Nut Butter Aisles

Here is another opportunity to add plant-based proteins to your diet. Nuts (and seeds) can be found raw or roasted, salted or sodium-free, and even flavored with cinnamon or dipped in chocolate! For the most nutrients for your buck, reach for the packages with

the fewest ingredients – nuts may not be the only ingredient, so if the list goes beyond three (including salt and oil), you may be getting more than you expected, and less of what your body needs (i.e. sugar, artificial sweeteners, starches). The same can be said for nut butters: Choose your peanut, almond, cashew, or sunflower butters with the

fewest ingredients to ensure that you reap the health benefits of nuts, including their essential fatty acids, without consuming unnecessary fillers or flavorings.

Next time you are shopping in your local market, make sure to fill your cart primarily with the fresh foods from the perimeter of the store, and then venture to the center aisles to select plant-based proteins and whole grains. Your body will thank you!

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