

Smart Shopping: A Grocery Store Tour

This section provides a framework to implement guided grocery tours for WIC clients and people in the community. During a supermarket tour, participants gain hands on experience in how to make healthy food choices throughout the grocery store. This section covers the basic information and tools needed to implement a one-time event or a series of guided grocery store tours. The training kit includes the following tools: Planning checklists, points to consider when planning a grocery store tour, a description of sample activities, a sample supermarket contract letter, clients handouts and a resource list. The material in this section was developed by LA 26.

Plan your Supermarket Tour Checklist:

2-3 Months in Advance:

- Identify a local supermarket that is affordable and located at a convenient place. Keep in mind the availability of public transportation.
- Request approval directly from the grocery store or from supermarket chain's corporate office
 - Discuss the need for a place for meeting clients at the beginning of the tour (main entrance, cafeteria, meeting room, etc.)
 - Consider the need for having an extra WIC staff member to work with the children or include the children in the tour.
 - Explore the possibility for the supermarket to provide refreshments or snacks.
 - Check for availability of grocery store coupons to be given to clients during the tour.
- Develop an event flyer to market the tour and distribute it at WIC.
- Plan for incentives, such as coupons or tote bags.
- Choose specific grocery store areas to cover during the tour. Write the lesson objectives with that in mind.
- Determine which handouts can be included in the participant's package (optional).
- Create a poster/signage to place at the registration table.
- Designate staff members to assist with scheduling and program operations.
- Set up a recruitment system (phone calls, sign-up sheets at the WIC sites or other methods).
- Plan for 10 – 15 people per tour. More than 15 people block supermarket aisles.
- Prepare pre-post surveys and program evaluation forms (if applicable).

One Month in Advance:

- Continue recruiting and promoting the tour until slots are filled. Recruit more people than the expected number. Some clients will not show up.
- Reproduce handouts and other forms to be used during the tour.
- Assemble participant's package, including handouts, WIC Shopping Guides as well as other take-home tip sheets and/or recipes (optional).

One Week Before:

- Remind supermarket manager of the number of participants expected to attend the tour and confirm arrangements for refreshments/snacks.
- Review tour scripts.
- Set up table with signage/posters, participant's package and take home materials. Display educational packages and name tags (optional).
- Check accuracy of participant information.

During the tour:

- Group clients at the main entrance or designated area. Introduce yourself and the purpose of the tour.
- Distribute and collect pre-survey (if applicable).
- Briefly guide them through the materials they have in their package/folders:
 - Basic tips on grocery shopping.
 - Basic rules of food label reading.
- Take clients aisle-by-aisle following the pre-determined script. Focus on the most important activities and be aware of the time. Time goes by very fast, and it is likely that fewer activities than planned will be covered.
- Engage adults as well as older children in program activities.

Concluding the Tour:

- Invite them to sample the refreshments (if serving them).
- Use the food to get participants involved in discussing points learned through the tour.
- Briefly summarize main points discussed.
- Administer and collect post-test and program evaluation (if applicable).
- Distribute certificate or passes for nutrition education.

After the Tour:

- Send a thank you letter/e-mail to the supermarket manager.
- Evaluate the tour process, outcome, attendance rate and make the necessary changes for the next grocery tour.

Points to Consider When Planning the Grocery Tour Content and Duration:

- Duration: Most tours are conducted in 1 -2 hours. Allow at least half an hour for registration, introduction, refreshments and conclusion.
- Tour Script: content and depth of information may vary depending on the duration of the tour and knowledge level of the audience. Choose from the main sessions/areas described below to concentrate the education activities.
- Flow: Starting with the perimeter aisles and then moving through the center aisles often facilitates flow.

The Grocery Store Tour

This section reviews a list of important comments to make during the tour, as well as some objectives and suggestions for activities in the store's main areas. Keep in mind that not all departments need to be covered in one tour. If holding a series of grocery store tours, there's enough information for these areas to be covered individually or in groups or two along with activities.

Objectives and suggested nutrition education activities for different areas:

Fresh Produce:

Objectives:

- Use the “rainbow of color concept” to teach health benefits and key nutrients and phytochemicals of colored fruits and vegetables.
- Review the recommended daily servings for fruits and vegetables.
- Introduce clients to unusual fruits and vegetables. Avoid focusing on vegetables and fruits that are too expensive.

Suggested Activities:

1. Ask participants to think about the fruits or vegetable they ate the day before and to share how many servings they ate. Review the daily recommendation.
2. Allow participants to choose a colorful fruit or vegetable and share tips on how to prepare/use it.

Meat, Poultry and Seafood

Objectives:

- Explain the nutritional value of meat, poultry and seafood, and the consequences of eating saturated fat (meat and poultry).
- Review daily recommended amounts of meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Explain the importance of limiting consumption of seafood that contains harmful contaminants (methyl-mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls), especially for pregnant women and children.
- Show how to select and prepare leaner cuts of meat and poultry.

Suggested Activities:

Meat and Poultry Section:

1. Put several cuts of meat side-by-side: a lean (round, loin), medium (chuck) and high fat cuts (fajitas, brisket, chicken legs with skin). Ask for volunteers to identify the leanest cut. Show them how the saturated fat is distributed in the meat and the health consequences of eating it in excess.
2. Show packages of ground meat and turkey. Ask participants to identify which is leaner. Give tips on reading labels to identify fat percentage and cut type and how to use this to select ground meat and turkey.

3. Show a 1 lb. cut of meat and ask clients how many can be served with that amount of meat. Review recommended daily serving sizes.

Seafood Section:

1. Point out several types of fish that are farm raised and caught wild. Ask the seafood supervisor to show the group one of the very large fish such as shark or king mackerel, which are highly contaminated with methyl-mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls. Briefly explain the importance of avoiding consumption of methyl-mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls.
2. Show an example of a fatty and non-fatty fish and review importance of omega-3 fatty acids. Review health benefits of eating fish, contaminated fish/seafood, especially for children and pregnant women.
3. Show difference in nutritional value of a shellfish and an imitation product. The last is normally lower in protein and higher in carbohydrate (added starches/flours), so have a volunteer read the ingredient list.

Processed Meats: Luncheon Meats and Other Processed Meats:

Objectives:

- Teach clients to select processed meat prepared from lean meats (examples: lean ham, lean hot dogs, lean meat with soy protein added).
- Advise clients about the high content of nitrates/nitrites and sodium in processed meats and the association of high sodium intake and hypertension. For food safety, lunch meats should be heated until steaming when offering these to pregnant women and young children.

Suggested Activities:

1. Hand packages of salami, bologna, turkey, cooked and smoked ham and ask them to read the labels and identify serving size, percentage of calories from fat and sodium content and the first three ingredients. Point out the leaner ones.
2. Pick up a ring of sausage and have clients guess the size of the portion; then read label to show high fat percentage. Point out that sausages have very high fat content.
3. Explain the importance of limiting processed meats that are high in fat, sodium, nitrates, etc.

Dairy: Milk, Yogurt, Cheese

Objectives:

- Discuss the nutritional value and health benefits of dairy products.
- Review recommended daily servings of dairy products.
- Compare a variety of milk, yogurt and cheese products focusing on calcium, calories, fat and sugar content.

Suggested Activities:

Milk Activity:

1. Read labels and compare fat and calorie content among whole, 2%, 1%, and fat free milk. Remind clients to not always look at the color of tab, remind that the same cow creates all milk (no difference with store brand).
2. Explain different types of milk like soy, lactose free, etc. and explain when those types of milks may be needed.

Yogurt Activity:

1. Compare two or three yogurt brands for fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, artificial colors and sweeteners, presence of “live” and Active cultures, etc.
2. Point out the nutritional value of different types of yogurts such as nonfat, Greek, plain, flavored, “light”, etc.

Cheese Activity:

1. Hand clients three bricks of natural cheeses (ex. Cheddar, Monterey jack, and part skim mozzarella) and one or two pasteurized processed cheese. Allow clients to read labels and report the amount of fat, protein and calcium.
2. Point out the difference in nutritional value of the cheeses and ingredients.

Cereals:

Objectives:

- Read ingredient list to identify whole grain cereals.
- Identify cereals low in sugar and high in fiber (less than 3 grams of fat, 10 grams or less sugar, minimal of 3 grams of fiber per ounce of cereal).
- Identify cereals with 45% of the DRI of iron and 400 mcg or more for folic acid per serving. Explain health benefits of iron for children and pregnant women and folic acid for pregnant women.

Suggested Activities:

1. Hand packages of oatmeal and grits to clients. Allow them to compare the amount of fiber and sugar. Point out that instant and/or flavored “hot cereals” are often low in fiber and high in sugar.
2. Ask clients to find a low sugar and high fiber cereal (let them use the WIC Foods shopping guide and check an approved cereal that is indicated as high fiber) and compare them with a cereal such as Fruit Loops or Fruity Pebbles that are high in sugar.

Breads, Tortillas and Crackers:

Objectives:

- Show clients how to select healthy crackers (i.e., whole grain and no more than 5% of total calories from fat).
- Assist clients in picking up whole grain breads and tortillas; look for those with no more than 1 gram fat, and no less than 3 grams of fiber. Make sure to point out the number of servings and look for breads that have one gram or more of fiber per slice.
- Show clients how to evaluate nutrition information when selecting which cookies to buy.

Suggested Activities:

1. Select two different brands of crackers. Make sure one has 3 or more grams of fiber and no more than 5% of total calories from fat or 3 – 4 grams of fat per serving and low in hydrogenated fat. (Ex. Triscuit crackers). Let clients compare the two choices.
2. Ask clients to search for whole wheat breads and tortillas with at least 2 – 3 grams of fiber per slice. Look for 100% whole-wheat on the label. Such expressions as “wheat flour” usually refer to refined white flour with lower fiber, vitamin and mineral content. Be aware that brown bread may be made with white flour and caramel coloring unless the label specifies 100% whole-wheat and is the first ingredient in the ingredient list.
3. Show clients a cookie package that is low in sugar and fat (ex. Graham or animal crackers) and compare with a package higher in calories and fat (chocolate chip cookies). Compare serving sizes and number of crackers per package. Most of the inexpensive and readily available brands are made with white flour.

Fats, Oils and Salad Dressings:

Objectives:

- Identify margarines that are lower in hydrogenated fat and trans-fat-acids. Explain the health consequences of excessive consumption of trans-fat.
- Select cooking oils that are high in monounsaturated fats and explain the benefits of a diet high in unsaturated fats.

Suggested Activities:

1. Pick up a stick of butter, a stick of margarine and a liquid or creamy margarine (trans-fat free). Compare fat, saturated fat, trans-fat, calorie content and ingredients. Margarines that are solid at room temperature are higher in saturated and trans-fat than tub margarines with soft or liquid consistency. Point out the association to heart disease and cancer.
2. Display food labels for olive, canola, corn and vegetable oil side by side with labels facing front: Ask clients to read the content of mono and polyunsaturated and choose the healthiest oil based on the monounsaturated fat content.
3. Show samples of cooking sprays and compare fat and calorie content.
4. Pick up two salad dressings, such as “Italian dressing” and “Ranch dressing.” Read the fat content and ingredients aloud and ask participants to tell which is the healthiest choice. Name some dressing alternatives that can be made at home instead using bottled dressings (ex. Oil and vinegar, homemade yogurt dressings, etc.)

Dry Fruits, Candy Bars, Popcorn and Baked Snack Chips:

Objectives:

- Use ingredients, fat and sugar content to identify healthy snacks.
- Read snacks' nutritional value to identify the less harmful crunchy snacks.
- Explain how trail mix and/or nuts can be a high-calorie healthy snack (nuts are high in mono-unsaturated fat and prevent cardiovascular disease).

Suggested Activities:

1. Ask clients to compare fat and sugar content between two dried fruits (raisins or prunes and dried cranberries or dried bananas. The bananas are often fried).
2. Look at bags of several snack chips (ex. Cheetos, Fritos, regular and baked tortilla chips or pretzels) and have clients identify better choices.
3. Hand bag packages of "Chex Mix" original and whole grain versions. Have clients read the first ingredient of the ingredient list. It must be a whole grain to be considered a whole grain product.
4. Hand participants a couple bags of microwave popcorn with butter and one with fat/trans-fat free. Ask clients to identify the differences in fat and calories. Describe ways to make popcorn from scratch at home using popcorn kernels (ex. Hot air popcorn popper, on stove top with a small amount of oil, in microwave, etc.) Explain it is healthier and more economical to make popcorn from scratch.
5. Point out basic "trail mix" ingredients. Explain which ones are healthier ingredients. Describe ways to make "trail mix" at home from cereal, raisins, nuts, etc. Note that nuts are high in monounsaturated fat and can be a great snack when used in moderation.

Beverages: Juices, Fruit Punches, Nectars and Sports Drinks

Objectives:

- Show difference between 100% fruit juices, fruit punches and fruit drinks. Review daily recommended amounts for infants, children and adults.
- Remind participant when it is appropriate to use sports drinks (for example, when exercising for more than 1 hour.)

Suggested Activities:

1. In the refrigerated section, allow clients to compare the labels of 100% fruit juice of store brands with labels of fruit punches such as "sunny D" or "Tampico".
2. Allow clients to read the first three ingredients of soft drinks and sports drinks such as "Capri Sun", "PowerAde", and "Gatorade". Point out the sugar content in the first three ingredients. Point out that sugar in processed foods can be listed under a variety of substitutes such as honey, syrup, fructose, molasses, fruit juice sweeteners or malt syrup.

Frozen Foods: Vegetables, Fruits and Meals

Objectives:

- Provide ideas on how to incorporate convenience foods into balanced meals.
- Discuss how to incorporate frozen fruits and vegetables into daily meals.
- Discuss using frozen fruits and vegetables without added sugars, sauces and cheese as a highly recommended option. Often these may be higher in nutrients than fresh vegetables that have lingered in the store or in the refrigerator.
- Advice on the use of frozen entrees. These should have no more than 10 grams of fat and less than 800 milligrams of sodium.

Suggested Activities:

1. Find a popular frozen food among the clients (ex. Fish sticks or frozen dinners). Help them identify the healthiest version or how it can be incorporated into a healthy meal (ex. Adding frozen vegetables to already prepared and frozen pasta meals).
2. Find a frozen vegetable or fruit on sale. Ask a volunteer to identify how many people can be fed with one package and price per unit. Relate it to price and availability of fresh version of the same vegetable or fruit.