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5 Easy Ways to Find Healthier Options at the Grocery Store

The Freeman · 23 May 2022 · 13 · (healthyforgood.heart.org)

Eating right – what you put in your mouth – starts with what you put in your shopping cart!

Want to make smart food choices but confused by all the health claims, messages and logos on foods? Take these tips to avoid the brain strain:

Read food labels, even for so-called "healthier" foods. Ingredients and nutrient content can vary a lot by brand and preparation. When there's more than one choice, compare labels. Choose the item with the lowest amounts of sodium, saturated fat, trans fat and added sugars.

Beware of sneaky ingredients. For example, sodium and added sugars go by many different names, making it harder to tell just how much is in there.

Choose frozen, canned or dried produce when fresh isn't available or practical. It can be just as nutritious as fresh, and will last longer. Choose canned fruit packed in water, light syrup or its own juice. With canned and frozen vegetables, choose the product with the lowest amount of sodium. Heavy syrups and sauces can add unwanted ingredients to your healthy fruits and veggies.

Choose whole-grain foods. Lots of products claim to be, but there's a simple way to know for sure. Look for the word "wholegrain" (or "whole" followed by the grain name) as the first item in the ingredients list. And we're talking more than just bread. Include crackers, cereals, tortillas, pasta and other grain foods in your whole-grain quest.

Look for the Heart-Check mark. It's the way to quickly and easily identify foods that can be part of an overall healthy eating plan. When it's on the label, you know the product has been certified to meet specific science-based nutrition requirements. The Heart-Check is easy to spot and takes some of the guesswork out of comparing Nutrition Facts label information.

Keep in mind that not all red hearts or check marks on food packages are the trusted Heart-Check mark! Look for the American Heart Association (AHA) name if you're unsure. And, the Heart-Check program is voluntary. That means not every heart-healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables, will apply for a Heart-Check mark. But you won't find the Heart-Check on desserts, candy, chips and other foods that do not meet the AHA nutrition requirements.