

Smart Shopping to Trim Time in the Kitchen

Make the most of your time when you go to the supermarket with a plan.

By: EatingWell Editors

An easy way to get quick, healthy dinners

on the table is to go to the grocery store armed with a plan—and a list. Using these eight tips for supermarket success, you'll be equipped to find the freshest ingredients to put dinner on the table in a flash.

Choose ripe produce. It may sound simple, but ripe fruits and vegetables cook faster and add much more flavor than their immature counterparts. How do you tell what's ripe? Smell your fruits and vegetables: if it doesn't smell like anything, it won't taste like anything.

Choose fast-cooking cuts of meat. Save the pot roast for the weekend when you have more time for slow cooking. During the week, pick small cutlets, chops and fillets that start out tender and cook quickly.

Insist on fresh meat and fish. Ask the person behind the fish or meat counter if you can smell before you buy. Fish and shellfish should smell like the ocean at high tide on a spring morning, not super "fishy." Meat should smell clean and bright, not like copper or soured yogurt.

Sometimes less is more. Buying produce or meat in bulk can save money, but it can kill time too. When you're faced with huge amounts of food to cook and store, it can be hard to find creative ways to use it. If you need one celery stalk or a handful of diced peppers, consider shopping at the salad bar in your market to buy exactly what you can use and no more.

Embrace convenience. Frozen vegetables and precut fresh vegetables can trim time and effort in the kitchen without sacrificing quality. Look for good-quality vegetables in your market's freezer case or produce section—and skip those loaded with extra salt. Prewashed bags of salad mixes also help add variety without sacrificing convenience.

Chop less. Buy containers of peeled garlic cloves and refrigerated jars of chopped ginger, both available in the produce section. The time saved in chopping can mean dinner on the table faster.

Choose convenience items carefully. Canned broths and tomato sauces can be a true gift to the cook. But beware of convenience products that are loaded with salt or hydrogenated fats (trans fats)—always check the nutrition label.

Shop with your pantry in mind. A well-stocked kitchen helps you avoid the there's-nothing-to-eat-so-let's-go-out moment. Keep a running list of pantry items and restock essentials when they run low.



Photo Credit: Ken Burris