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CHAPTER 1

Buying Grocery Staples



Grocery staples are the basic food items you use again and again. They are the foods you need to have on hand to put together meals on a regular basis.

Guidelines for Good Eating

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed guidelines for a healthy diet. Look at the illustration on the next page, which is from the USDA’s Web site: www.ChooseMyPlate.gov. This “plate” shows the



categories of foods you should eat every day and in what general amounts. Use this “plate” to help you decide what staples to keep in your kitchen.

Also visit the USDA’s Web site for other helpful information on healthy eating. Learn what foods to limit in your diet. And get a personal food plan based on your age, gender, size, and activity level.

Storing Foods

As you might guess, some of the foods from the USDA “plate” should be stored in the refrigerator or freezer. Dairy products, such as milk and cheese, must be refrigerated.

Many canned and bottled foods must be refrigerated after they’ve been opened. Otherwise, they will spoil. Look for this requirement on the food’s label.



Categories

Types or groups.



Fresh fruits and vegetables can be stored in the refrigerator but don’t have to be. So can grains, such as breads and muffins. These foods will generally last longer if kept cool.



Other foods should be stored in your pantry. A *pantry* is a cabinet, closet, or small room used for food storage. Foods stored in a pantry are often called *dry goods* and *canned goods*.

For all kinds of foods, pay attention to the **expiration date**. Most food can still be eaten past this date, but it's quality and taste won't be as good.

Expiration date

The date after which something should no longer be used.

[FACT]

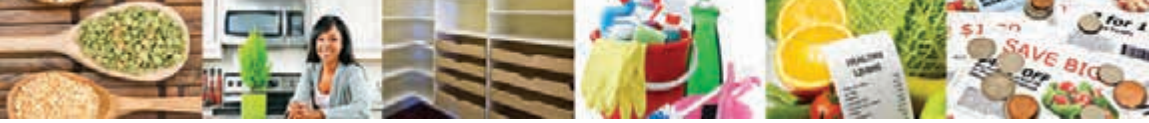
The Facts about Expiration Dates

Many people are surprised to learn that food isn't usually spoiled or harmful after its expiration date. It just won't taste as good, and the quality may not be as good.

Most people are also surprised to know that grocery stores don't have to remove foods from the shelves after their expiration dates. To avoid buying something old, you should check products' expiration dates while you shop. Look for these codes and know what they mean:

- **Sell by:** Don't buy a food after this date. This is the expiration date.
- **Best if used by:** The flavor or quality may be less after this date, but the food can still be eaten.
- **Use by:** This is the last day the food's manufacturer stands by its quality.





Other Staples to Have on Hand

Do you bake often? If so, staples for your kitchen should include baking supplies, such as flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and yeast.

Herbs and spices are also staples. Rosemary, oregano, thyme, cinnamon, and pepper all add flavor to food.

And what about **condiments**? Products such as soy sauce, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and barbecue sauce are staples, too.



Shopping for Staples

When you shop, always be aware of how long a product will stay fresh. Fresh fruits and vegetables can't be stored for very long. But canned and frozen fruits and vegetables can be stored for quite some time.

You can buy enough canned and frozen foods to fill up your pantry and your freezer. But you should buy only as much fresh food as you can eat in a few days.

Condiments

Sauces and other toppings that add flavor to food. Condiments are generally put on the table and used by individuals to flavor their own food.