

Keeping a Check on Your Household Spending

Nearly 32 cents of every dollar spent by American families is for groceries and household items. Individuals make an average of three trips a week to the grocery store, and one or more stops at a drug or discount store. In many instances, people are spending money they could otherwise be saving for the future because they fail to compare, and get the most for their money. Stores cleverly display merchandise in locations that do not escape the eyes – all designed to get the shoppers to spend. Given the “growing scarcity” of the dollar, what steps can the consumer take to reduce spending and get the most for their hard earned dollar? The keys are to spend smarter, compare quality, price and value, and buy the bigger items without borrowing. Here are some tips to guide you as you go to the grocery store.

- **Use a list when shopping.** Write everything you want on the list and do not add any items once you get to the store. Avoid impulse buying and go alone after a meal. If you shop while you're hungry, the temptation to buy items you would not normally buy is greater and you end up spending more.
- **Watch for store ads.** Check for sale prices on items you normally buy. Look for “two-for-one” buys. Compare prices with other stores, especially those you don't normally visit. Use coupons whenever possible. Pay special attention to the days of the week when the sale prices are in effect.
- **Try to use cash instead of using a debit card or writing a check.** Using cash makes a great impact on the mind. It causes you to think ahead and spend only what's in your wallet.
- **Always shop by the unit price of the items.** Check various brands, including the store brand, of the same size item for the price per ounce, per item, etc.
- **Plan meals in advance.** Be mindful of using leftovers or freezing for later use when purchasing meats and making pasta dishes. Consider buying meat items you regularly use in bigger quantities, as long as you have adequate freezer space.
- **Be cautious about adding non-food items to the grocery list.** Items such as health and beauty products, paper and plastic goods, and utensils cost more when purchased at the grocery store. Consider purchasing these at a discount store.
- **Stick to the list.** When shopping, stick to the list you made. Remember to make the list before, not while or after you have shopped.
- **Check the checker.** Note the prices as you select the item and make sure the same price is charged at check-out. Check the register tape after you have paid. Unintentional errors can occur, especially if you have bought a number of items.