

From Grocery Cart to Chaos: Overbuying Food

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Food management might not be your favorite topic, but saving \$1,000 a year might be! Many of my clients struggle with overbuying food products and then end up throwing them away. Here are some key reasons this happens and ways to prevent it.

Why we overbuy

I've noticed that many of us are reeled into food purchases because of impulse buying, shopping without a list, and shopping when we are hungry (GUILTY).

There is a reason grocery stores have products next to the checkout stand – impulse shoppers, especially HUNGRY impulse shoppers.

Vendors pay prime rates for those spaces because their market research shows that shoppers purchase those items at an alarming rate. Shopping without a list probably means you have not planned your food needs for the week, and of course shopping while hungry is down right self sabotage.

Consequences of overbuying

Food waste, overspending, and unhealthy habits are a few of the top consequences of overbuying. Food waste and overspending are self explanatory, but the unhealthy habits might not be.

In many cases, overbuying food leads to overeating. You and your family will eat what is available and if you are concerned about a healthy lifestyle, you need to manage what everyone has access to in your home. It can be so much easier to limit the purchase of the sweets and snacks than to monitor them once they are in the house.

It can be a constant battle; I know, I raised 3 kids of my own and being the food police is not fun.

How to prevent overbuying

- Shop your pantry, refrigerator and freezer first. Take inventory of what needs to be eaten and what you are running low on.
- Keep like items together in your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer. I know that sounds like overkill, but if you try it, you will be amazed at

how much money you will save when you are not throwing out expired food or buying more than you need because you didn't realize you already had it.

- Create a meal plan for the week ahead based on your family's current calendar. This needs to be done each week as your schedule will constantly change with different activities. If you look at your current schedule and see if you have work events, kids activities, dinner dates, etc. you will need to pack dinners or plan on eating out for some of the nights.

- Consider if your family likes to eat leftovers; if they don't, maybe pair down the amount of food you are making for one dinner. Use recipes that are smaller and feed a family of 4 rather than a larger recipe that results in a lot of leftovers. For example, you could divide the 6 pack of chicken breasts and freeze half for another meal.

- Be very cautious of bulk purchases, especially if you do not have the space to store the items. Also, remember that fresh food-bulk purchases are a commitment: bread, fruit, veggies and dairy can be tricky as they expire quickly. Ask yourself if your family will really eat 25 apples a week! Trying to keep food in the house for a large family is very time consuming, and purchasing in bulk can be very helpful. I have even recommended that clients share the bulk purchases with other families so they can both benefit with the cost savings. The caution with bulk purchases is they have to be managed. I find this to be most problematic with frozen bulk purchases. Freezers are often hard to keep organized and therefore many items get lost and die in the back or the bottom. I know this might sound ridiculous but it's advisable to keep a current inventory after your shopping trip of what is in the freezer. Keep in mind that the effort you put into this can save you hundreds of dollars a year.

- Keep an ongoing grocery list, either on your phone or a paper copy. Having a list can be very helpful and curb impulse purchases (this takes a little discipline). There are many apps that can be instrumental in planning meals, creating shopping lists, and even help with the inventory. Cozy Family Organizer and Yummly are a few apps you can check out.

- Limit your quantities by using a container as a limiter. In other words, if the container is full of the product, don't purchase any more. It's also an easy inventory visual to glance at in the pantry and see that the container is full or needs refilling.

Food Organization Tips Refrigerator/Freezer

In the refrigerator, keep categories of products together in one section (for example, dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.).

- Meat should be kept on the lower shelves to prevent any drips from contaminating other foods.

- Fruits and veggies should be in a drawer in the refrigerator to maintain freshness. You could even use produce-specific storage containers to extend the life of the item.

- Condiments and sauces usually fit nicely in the door of the refrigerator for easy access, and then they don't get lost in the back.

- Try using a shelf riser inside the refrigerator -- trust me, this is a game changer.

Pantry

- You can arrange your pantry several ways.

Some of my clients like to keep categories such as dinner, breakfast, snacks and sweets together; others like to keep it by type such as pasta/rice, canned goods, baking mixes, and snacks together. One of my clients kept the food organized by the household member!

- If you are tight on space, try using the vertical space on the inside of the door. Container Store sells an over the door basket system by Elfa that holds a ton of products on the door.

Once you get the hang of this, you won't be throwing out food and you'll start saving money. The only catch to this is YOU HAVE TO MAINTAIN IT!! Good luck and happy organizing!

Professional Organizer, Jennifer Raftis, CPO® founded Efficiency Matters, LLC to help you with all of your organizing needs for your home and business. She is a Certified Professional Organizer and an active board member with NAPO, National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals.

She is also an independent representative for The Container Store and has expertise in designing closets, garages, pantries, playrooms and more.

In addition, she is a Corporate Organizing and Productivity Consultant and has worked with Fortune 500 companies across the U.S. Another large part of her business is move management especially working with seniors who are downsizing. She and her husband have lived in Moraga for 30 years, raising 3 kids and working countless volunteer hours with many local non-profit organizations and schools. Jennifer@efficiencymattersllc.com, 925-698-3756 www.efficiencymattersllc.com

