





what's
FOR
dinner?
part 1



Money-Saving Tip

Buy produce in bulk when it's in season or on sale and freeze it. After washing, submerge small amounts of veggies in boiling water for a minute; cool in ice water. Drain, then pack in a freezer container. Wash berries and lay in a single layer on a baking tray and freeze; place in an airtight container.



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE GROCERY STORE

We cut through the chaos and tell you what you should buy—and where you can save your money.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONNY VALIANT

Coming up with weeknight meals sometimes feels like a full-time job, but *Parents* is about to change that. In our three-part series, “What’s for Dinner?” we help you shop, prep, and cook faster, easier, and healthier than before. First up: no more wondering which food labels to pay attention to, or when it’s best to go organic (or not!). We take you aisle by aisle, helping you select everything you need for dinner. Get ready to spend way less time at the supermarket!



IN THE PRODUCE SECTION, LOOK FOR

*** Conventional fruits and vegetables that harbor the fewest pesticide residues** (see “Clean 15,” right). Many of these have either a thick rind or covering you discard (pineapples, watermelon, cantaloupe) or a strong odor that naturally fends off pests (asparagus and onions). Kids are more vulnerable to harm from pesticides—that includes an increased risk for cancer—and other environmental toxins, says a 2009 report from the President’s Cancer Panel.

*** Organic versions of fruits and vegetables that traditionally have the most pesticide residues** (see “Dirty Dozen,” right). If your family eats these foods frequently, by switching to organic you can cut your intake of pesticides by as much as 80 percent, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit that aims to protect public health and the environment. But the health benefits of eating a lot of produce still outweigh the possible risks of pesticides. “The key is to get your child eating fruits and vegetables, whether they’re organic or not,” says pediatrician and *Parents* advisor Darshak Sanghavi, M.D.

*** Produce grown in the U.S.** Regardless of whether you buy conventional or organic, try to stay local or at least within the U.S. “There’s a clear trend showing more risk of pesticides with imported produce than with U.S.-grown,” says Chuck Benbrook, Ph.D., chief scientist for the Organic Center, a nonprofit organization that conducts research on organic food and farming. Domestic produce is easier to find if you buy it in season (it’s cheaper too).

Health-Boosting Tip

Vigorously wash conventional produce. Rubbing or swirling it in a colander under running tap water for at least 15 seconds reduces pesticide deposits by 30 percent, according to a report in *Food and Chemical Toxicology*.

CLEAN 15

Generally low in pesticide residues:

- 1 Onions
- 2 Corn
- 3 Pineapples
- 4 Avocados
- 5 Asparagus
- 6 Sweet peas
- 7 Mangoes
- 8 Eggplant
- 9 Domestic cantaloupe
- 10 Kiwi
- 11 Cabbage
- 12 Watermelon
- 13 Sweet potatoes
- 14 Grapefruit
- 15 Mushrooms

DIRTY DOZEN

Consider buying organic:

- 1 Apples
- 2 Celery
- 3 Strawberries
- 4 Peaches
- 5 Spinach
- 6 Imported nectarines
- 7 Imported grapes
- 8 Sweet bell peppers
- 9 Potatoes
- 10 Blueberries
- 11 Lettuce
- 12 Kale/collard greens

AT THE FISH & SEAFOOD COUNTER, LOOK FOR

*** Items from the U.S.** (Check the country of origin on the label or tag.) “We have some of the best-regulated fisheries in the world, which means healthier, safer seafood for you,” says Kate Geagan, R.D., author of *Go Green, Get Lean*. The Dietary Guidelines also recommend swapping out meat and poultry for seafood twice a week to get lower amounts of saturated fat and more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, which bolster brain development as well as heart health.

*** Certain imported fish.**

Farmed tilapia from Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, or Honduras; cocktail shrimp from the Canadian Atlantic; and haddock from Iceland are all safe alternatives when you can't find U.S. fish, according to The Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Program. See “Smart Seafood Picks,” below, for more.

*** Canned salmon.** It has more calcium than fresh, and it's also a more economical choice.

SMART SEAFOOD PICKS

These choices tend to be lower in contaminants and have higher levels of healthy omega-3 fatty acids than other fish, says the Seafood Watch Program.

- Albacore tuna (from the U.S.)
- Oysters (worldwide)
- Pacific sardines (from the U.S.)
- Rainbow trout (from the U.S.)
- Arctic char (from the U.S., Canada, Norway, and Iceland)
- Barramundi (from the U.S.; farmed)
- Dungeness crab (from the U.S. Pacific and Canada)
- Longfin squid (from the U.S. Atlantic)
- Mussels (worldwide)

WHAT TO BUY

Beef Opt for sirloin, eye of round roasts, and tenderloin

Pork Go for tenderloin, loin roasts, and loin or rib chops

Ground beef Choose 90 to 95 percent lean

Ground poultry Get lean (which usually contains less than 10 grams of fat per serving) or extra lean (which has less than 5).

Note: As of January 1, 2012, all fresh meat and poultry that is sold in supermarkets in the United States will have a nutrition label.

Meat and Poultry: Organic or Not?

When you see that meat and poultry has been labeled as certified organic, it means that the animals were not administered antibiotics and were treated more humanely. Of course, this doesn't guarantee that it's healthier than its conventional counterparts. Organic poultry does offer one clear benefit, though: no arsenic—approved by the government as a dietary supplement and used in small amounts in commercial chicken feed, says Cindy Burke, author of *To Buy or Not to Buy Organic*.

AT THE MEAT & POULTRY COUNTER, LOOK FOR

*** Lean meats and poultry.** These contain less saturated fat and fewer calories, according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Eating lean cuts (and trimming away visible fat) may also lessen your exposure to synthetic pesticide residues, hormones, and antibiotics, since they tend to accumulate in the animals' fat.

*** Beef that's “grass fed.”** This means that the cow ate grass and hay exclusively for its entire life, and the meat naturally has higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids. While it has fewer omega-3s than seafood, grass-fed beef can be particularly helpful for children who don't eat a lot of fish or don't take an omega-3 supplement, says Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D., author of *Read It Before You Eat It*.

*** Meat and poultry with “No Antibiotics Added.”** Antibiotics are often given to animals to prevent illness, and the meds may create drug-resistant superbugs that could be passed to people.

AT THE DAIRY CASE, LOOK FOR

- * **1 percent or skim milk.** The Dietary Guidelines recommend this for the whole family, to help limit your intake of heart-harming saturated fat. One big exception: Toddlers younger than 2 should drink whole milk, because the fat is needed for brain development (your pediatrician may suggest 2 percent if there's a high risk for obesity).
- * **Milk that's fortified.** No need to go organic here. As long as it's fortified, it doesn't matter whether the milk is organic or conventional, says Terry D. Etherton, Ph.D., department head of dairy and animal science at Pennsylvania State University's College of Agricultural Sciences, in University Park. For a bit more money, you can get nutrients beyond vitamin D, including omega-3 fatty acids, beta-carotene, vitamin E, and conjugated linoleic acid (or CLA), a type of fat that may help lower cholesterol levels and boost bone formation.
- * **Low-fat and fat-free versions of cheese and yogurt.** (Full-fat cheese is fine for kids under 2.) As with milk, you want to restrict the amount of saturated fat your family consumes.
- * **Eggs with omega-3 fatty acids.** These fortified eggs are key if you don't eat a lot of fish or take fish-oil supplements. Be sure the omega-3s are the hard-to-come-by DHA and EPA and not ALA, which doesn't offer as many health benefits.
- * **Certified organic eggs if your family eats eggs often.** They're produced without antibiotics and synthetic pesticides—not always true of conventional eggs. While they can't replace the amino acids in meat, organic eggs are still an inexpensive source of protein.

Don't Bother!

While brown eggs may look more wholesome, they offer no nutritional advantage. Also, don't be swayed by labels like "cage-free," "all-natural," and "farm fresh"—the terms aren't regulated and therefore don't mean much.

5 COMMANDMENTS OF HEALTHY FOOD SHOPPING

1. Try to buy organic produce when your picks fall on the Dirty Dozen list and your family eats the food in large quantities.
2. Don't sweat it if organic produce isn't in your budget—the health benefits of eating a lot of fruits and vegetables still outweigh the possible risks.
3. Select seafood and fish from the United States because they're usually lowest in pollutants.
4. Choose lower-fat meats and dairy products; they're generally healthier.
5. When shopping for bread and pasta, make sure the first ingredient contains the word *whole*.



IN THE CENTER AISLES, LOOK FOR

*** Whole-grain bread and pasta with the word *whole* coming first in the ingredients list.**

Bread should have at least 2 to 3 grams of fiber per slice; pasta should have 5 grams or more per serving. White bread and pasta fortified with extra fiber are smart choices if your family rejects the taste of whole grains. But don't stress too much about going organic here. Grain foods are far less likely to contain pesticide residues than fresh fruits and vegetables, says Dr. Benbrook.


*** Canned fruits and vegetables.** They tend to have fewer pesticide residues. Because they're grown for the purpose of canning and don't need to look "perfect" for display, they're treated with fewer chemicals, says Dr. Benbrook. Canned foods (including beans) are washed multiple times during processing, which removes a lot of pesticide residues as well, he adds.

*** Foods packed in glass or paper, when possible.**

Canned foods may contain the chemical BPA (bisphenol A, used in can liners), which can interfere with the body's ability to produce hormones and has been linked to a number of health problems. In a study of 19 brand-name canned foods, *Consumer Reports* found BPA in all of them—including organic brands and even cans that were labeled "BPA-Free."

*** Tomato sauces made with little or no added sugar or sodium.** Also consider buying organic pasta sauces; they have higher levels of lycopene, a plant chemical that works as a disease-fighting antioxidant, according to research from the USDA.

*** Organic ketchup.** If your family eats a lot of the red stuff, you'll get more lycopene and no pesticide residues.



Coming Next Month

In Part 2 of our 3-part series, you'll get a week's worth of healthy family recipes, as well as meal-prep tricks to get dinner on the table fast.

IN THE FROZEN FOOD SECTION, LOOK FOR

*** Fruits and vegetables.** Because the produce is blanched before it's frozen, trapping nutrients inside, it's almost as nutritious as fresh. Follow the same "clean" and "dirty" lists as you do for fresh. (So splurge on organic frozen strawberries but save your money by choosing conventional frozen corn.) Whenever you buy frozen fruits and veggies, pick ones that contain no added sugar or sauces.

*** Pizzas with a whole-grain crust and veggie toppings.** Thin-crust pies tend to be lower in calories.

*** Chicken nuggets and patties with about 10 or fewer grams of fat and less than 500mg of sodium.** You can find varieties made with antibiotic-free chicken and no chemical preservatives, but you'll pay a bit more. You'll get less fat with meatless (soy) nuggets—plus a few grams of fiber—though they're still high in sodium.

*** French fries cooked with healthy oils like canola.** Compare brands to find ones with the lowest Daily Value of Sodium. Sweet-potato fries are also a healthy pick, thanks to their high vitamin A content.



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