

NEW SURVEY REVEALS WAREHOUSE SHOPPERS NEED TO "BULK UP" ON HOME FOOD SAFETY

American Dietetic Association Provides Smart Strategies for Bulk Food Shopping

Chicago, June 7, 2005 When the first warehouse clubs hit the streets more than 20 years ago, consumers were baffled by the new phenomenon of bulk buying. *Who wants five pounds of bacon and how long can you store it?* Today, club stores have become a mainstay in the retail landscape, and for many a weekly ritual; yet still, many shoppers are perplexed.

According to a new survey by the American Dietetic Association, more than half of all Americans (53 percent) shop warehouse stores for groceries more often today than they did just one year ago. While many say it's the value that keeps them coming back, more than half simply like stocking up on food. But properly storing and preparing bulk foods is a big concern among these shoppers, with two out of three asking for advice.

Consumers have embraced bulk-mania, yet, shopping these superstores for everything from home electronics to ice cream and storing groceries for months at a time can be confusing and present food safety concerns.

Maximize your warehouse experience and super-size your safety by following these five simple shopping guidelines from the American Dietetic Association.

1. Plan Your Attack

A majority of warehouse shoppers (61 percent) hit the food aisles first on a typical club store shopping trip. Half of these trips last as long as one to two hours, including stops for clothes, electronics, office supplies and even furnishings. Run a few additional errands or hit traffic on the way home, and consumers could find themselves unpacking spoiled food.

Shoppers need to be mindful of the two-hour rule: Perishable food purchases should never sit at room temperature for more than two hours, at which point, if harmful bacteria are present, they begin to multiply rapidly.

Because warehouse stores have not yet found their way onto every street corner, these shopping trips take time and should be scheduled. Plan accordingly, hitting the perishable food aisles last. If you expect your afternoon errands to last more than two hours, bring along a cooler filled with ice or an insulated sack to keep perishable foods properly chilled.

2. Learn the Cold Truth

Survey results show more than half of club store shoppers (54 percent) own a second refrigerator or freezer for storing bulk foods. Yet, most may have their appliances set at the wrong temperatures. A whopping 71 percent of Americans are unaware of the proper temperature settings for their refrigerators - and 86 percent don't know how to set the proper temperature for their freezers.

Freezers should be set at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit and refrigerators should be set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep track of your temps by placing a simple

refrigerator thermometer in each appliance and adjust accordingly to ensure your foods stay properly chilled.

3. A Meaty Matter

According to the ADA survey, more than nine out of 10 warehouse club store shoppers typically purchase fresh/frozen meat, poultry or seafood, and 78 percent stock up on lunch meat, bacon, sausage and hot dogs. While stocking up on these staple foods might make sense, it does require proper storage practices - which many people don't follow.

Most bulk buyers store fresh/frozen meat, poultry and seafood in their freezers, keeping other meat products, such as lunch meat, bacon, sausage, and hot dogs stored in refrigerators only. Yet these other meats can be stored in freezers as well to extend shelf life.

When stored in a refrigerator, a sealed package of hot dogs, for instance, will last two weeks, one week if opened. Stored in the freezer, a time limit of one to two months is recommended for best quality.

4. Think through Thawing

ADA cautions against refreezing uncooked meat/poultry that has thawed -- something nearly one in five (18 percent) people do. Thawing and refreezing foods not only can reduce the quality of food, it also can present a food safety risk if the internal temperature of the food reaches more than 40 degrees F. Instead, try repackaging bulk meat/poultry purchases into smaller packages before freezing. That way, you can defrost just what you need for each meal.

5. Know When to Say When

According to the ADA survey, nearly half of all bulk food shoppers store their perishables for three weeks or longer - with 25 percent keeping perishable food items for more than a month. When it comes to deciding when foods should go, more than 60 percent of people rely on their senses - tasting, smelling or seeing, to determine if food has spoiled versus checking the expiration date.

Food and nutrition experts agree: Paying attention to the expiration information on food packages is your best line of defense, unless once again, you choose to extend shelf life (slightly) by freezing.

For more help navigating the "dos" and "don'ts" of buying in bulk, download a free copy of the Refrigerator/Freezer Storage Chart, a printer-friendly tip sheet available at www.homefoodsafety.org.

With approximately 65,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. To locate a registered dietitian in your area, visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org.

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Source: Impulse Research Survey, April 2005.

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