

MN Class Activity: Commissary Tours/Visits

The following are general guidelines and discussion topics to help assist when providing food shopping tours or visits. While the discussion areas will not cover every detail and part of the commissary, the details below will help generate discussion between the instructor and the participants.

What to consider before scheduling a visit

- Ensure you have enough time, ~1-2 hours available to do a complete walk around the store.
 - Not all areas need to be visited at the same time. Possibly consider multiple visits to highlight certain areas.
- Prior approval from commissary/grocery store manager.
Ensure you ask for permission and explain your purpose for primary education. They may even be able to assist you! Search for your local commissary here: <http://www.commissaries.com>
- Schedule a time that works for attendees but also evaluate when slow shopping times are. If you go during busy hours, it may be too congested for a thorough exploration of all the areas.

Initial observations & things to highlight:

General flow of the store and where the main products can be found:

- Outside lanes of the market will usually have fresh produce, meat products, eggs, and most dairy products.
- Most processed foods will encompass the center aisles of a store.
 - Identify what foods primarily at eye level, and what are easily accessible throughout the store
 - Low cost, un-healthy or undesirable snack foods are always at the checkout aisles for a quick convenience, but also for kids to stare at while you're checking out!



- Better options among these processed foods such as oatmeal, brown rice, or most whole grain products will be at the very bottom row (usually out of sight)
- The “healthy” isle usually contains more expensive products that highlight latest trends/fads/ certain diets that are perceived healthy but don’t necessarily represent the best option (i.e. gluten free, organic)

Discussion Topics by Area

Fresh Produce

- Use the “rainbow of color concept” to teach health benefits and key nutrients and phytochemicals of colored fruits and vegetables.
- Introduce clients to unusual fruits and vegetables and share tips on how to prepare/use it.
- Identify cheaper vs. expensive foods, while also considering nutrient value: I.e. Romaine lettuce vs. Iceberg lettuce, Romaine lettuce may be slightly more expensive, but explain the nutrient value as well.
- Ask participants to compare the cost between an organic and a non-organic fruit and vegetable. Re-examine the “true” purpose of organic (has nothing to do with being more nutritious!)
- Find seasonal vs. out of season produce and compare the prices and nutritional content to that of frozen (have someone go to the frozen foods isle and select a few different frozen fruits/vegetables),
 - Frozen foods without any added ingredients can be cheaper while also containing a higher nutritional content (out of season produce loses nutritional value through shipping time and becomes more expensive)

Meat Products

Beef & Poultry

- Compare whole cuts of meat products (roasts, steaks, ground burger, whole turkey & chickens) versus processed meats



(hot dogs, bologna, deli meats) and explain nutrient differences regarding sodium and fat content.

- Put several cuts of meat side-by-side and compare fat content, as well as better meat selections than others:
 - Ex. a lean fat (round, loin, skinless), medium fat (chuck) and high fat cuts (brisket, chicken legs with skin). Ask for volunteers to identify the leanest cut. Show the marbling within the steaks and explain how that is the saturated fat.
 - Considering ground meat products, identify % of all types (chicken, beef, turkey) and explain importance of the % lean and how that impacts cooking.
 - Considering pricing, >90% lean is more expensive, but discuss the quantity of the product once cooked.
- Show a 1 lb. cut of meat and discuss how many servings that should provide.
- Show a roast or bone in meat (whole chicken) and identify multiple meals that can be cooked using it.

Seafood

- When considering fresh, it should not have a “fishy” smell at all, and the eyes will usually be bright with red gills.
- Frozen fish cuts may be cheaper, and should not be breaded or have any added fat.
- Discuss the general recommendations of fish (2-3 servings per week) and identify some of the common fish that contain a good source of omega-3 fatty acids (tuna, salmon, rainbow trout, and herring).
- Discuss the possible contaminants in all fish, such as methyl-mercury and that the larger the fish (shark, swordfish, king mackerel) the higher the levels of these contaminants.
- When considering shellfish and imitation products, compare nutrition labels to see that imitations usually have a lower protein and higher carbohydrate value (added starches/flours).



- When considering shellfish, shrimp, lobster, and crayfish will usually be higher in cholesterol but still low in saturated fat.
- Smoked fish will generally contain higher sodium content.

Dairy

Milk, Yogurt, & Cheese

- Read labels and compare fat and calorie content among whole, 2%, 1%, and fat free milk.
 - Also discuss flavored milk, and review the increased sugar content of those flavored milks
- Explain different types of milk like: Soy, Almond, & Lactose free milk, etc. and explain when those types of milks may be needed.
 - Review the protein, calcium, and sugar content of each to learn the varying differences
- Compare two or three yogurt brands for fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, artificial colors and sweeteners, presence of “live” and Active cultures, etc.
- Point out the nutritional value of different types of yogurts such as nonfat, Greek, plain, flavored, “light”, etc.
- Discuss the difference between natural cheeses (cheddar, colby, pepperjack) versus more process softer cheese (spreads, Kraft singles, etc.) that will contain more fats and possibly trans fats.

Cereals & Breads:

- Identify where whole grain products are located relative to white products. Look for whole grain label so everyone knows how to identify a whole grain item.
 - Many items say “whole wheat”, but may actually be enriched!
- Identify cereals low in sugar and high in fiber (less than 3 grams of fat, 10 grams or less sugar, minimal of 3 grams of fiber per ounce of cereal).



- Cereals that often have a cartoon or superhero associated with it may be high in sugar and low in fiber
- Hand packages of oatmeal and grits to clients. Allow them to compare the amount of fiber and sugar. Point out that instant and/or flavored “hot cereals” are often low in fiber and high in sugar.
- Grab examples of whole grain breads and tortillas; look for those with no more than 1 gram fat, and no less than 3 grams of fiber. Make sure to point out the number of servings and look for breads that have one gram or more of fiber per slice.

Fats, Oils and Salad Dressings:

- Select cooking oils that are high in unsaturated fats such as olive, canola, peanut, sunflower, corn, and sesame oils.
 - Display food labels for olive, canola, corn and vegetable oil side by side and read the content of mono and polyunsaturated and choose the healthiest oil based on the monounsaturated fat content.
 - Saturated fats such as coconut, palm, lard, and butter should be minimized.
 - Non-stick cooking sprays can be useful as well but they will supply calories just like the other oils.
- Identify margarines and butter spreads that are lower in hydrogenated fat and trans-fat-acids.
 - Pick up a stick of butter, a stick of margarine and a liquid or creamy margarine (trans-fat free).

Compare fat, saturated fat, trans-fat, calorie content and ingredients.

Margarines that are solid at room temperature are higher in saturated and trans-fat than tub margarines with soft or liquid consistency. Point out the association to heart disease and cancer.

- Pick up two salad dressings, such as “Italian dressing” and “Ranch dressing.” Read the fat content and ingredients. Have everyone look at the “Italian” dressing- can this item be replicated at home and made from scratch fairly easily?

Dry Fruits, Candy Bars, Popcorn and Baked Snack Chips:

- Explain how trail mix and/or nuts can be a high-calorie healthy snack (nuts are high in mono- unsaturated fat and prevent cardiovascular disease).
- Ask clients to compare fat and sugar content between two dried fruits (raisins or prunes and dried cranberries or dried bananas).
 - Identify when “added sugars” are included.
 - Can you find any products without added sugars? (May only be raisins)
- Look at bags of several snack chips (ex. Cheetos, Fritos, regular and baked tortilla chips or pretzels) and try to identify alternative/better options
- Hand bag packages of “Chex Mix” original and whole grain versions. Have clients read the first ingredient of the ingredient list. It must be a whole grain to be considered a whole grain product.
- Hand participants a couple bags of microwave popcorn with butter and one with fat/trans-fat free. Ask clients to identify the differences in fat and calories. Describe ways to make popcorn from scratch at home using popcorn kernels (ex. Hot air popcorn popper, on stove top with a small amount of oil, in microwave, etc.) Explain it is healthier and more economical to make popcorn from scratch.
- Point out basic “trail mix” ingredients. Explain which ones are healthier ingredients. Describe ways to make “trail mix” at home from cereal,

raisins, nuts, etc. Note that nuts are high in monounsaturated fat and can be a great snack when used in moderation.

Beverages: Juices, Fruit Punches, Nectars and Sports Drinks

- Show difference between 100% fruit juices, fruit punches and fruit drinks.
- In the refrigerated section, compare the labels of 100% fruit juice of store brands with labels of fruit punches such as “sunny D” or “Tampico”.
- Allow clients to read the first three ingredients of soft drinks and sports drinks such as “Capri Sun”, “PowerAde”, and “Gatorade”. Point out the sugar content in the first three ingredients. Point out that sugar in processed foods can be listed under a variety of substitutes such as honey, syrup, fructose, molasses, fruit juice sweeteners or malt syrup.
 - Soda products, sports drinks, flavored drinks all have excess added sugar and needed to be treated similarly, and try to avoid or minimize.

Frozen Foods: Vegetables, Fruits and Meals

- Discuss how frozen fruits and vegetables, with no added ingredients can be useful and just as beneficial as raw/fresh.
 - Discuss using frozen fruits and vegetables without added sugars, sauces and cheese as a highly recommended option.
- Evaluate a variety of frozen dinners and compare labels (Banquet, lean Cuisine, HungryMan, Swanson, etc.)
 - Do any contain less than 10 grams of total fat and less than 800 milligrams of sodium per container? Per serving?
 - Find frozen meals that are not pre-baked or fried in oil before being frozen? What other common ingredients are added to frozen meals?