

# Smart Shopping: Understanding Marketing Tactics

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When you shop for groceries, whether in stores or online, companies use many marketing strategies to encourage you to buy more. Knowing about these tactics can help you become a savvy shopper. Smart shoppers can save money and choose healthier food products. Here are some key strategies to think about: using coupons wisely, avoiding impulse purchases and comparing front-of-package claims with the nutrition facts label.

## Be Smart about Marketing Tactics

### Coupons

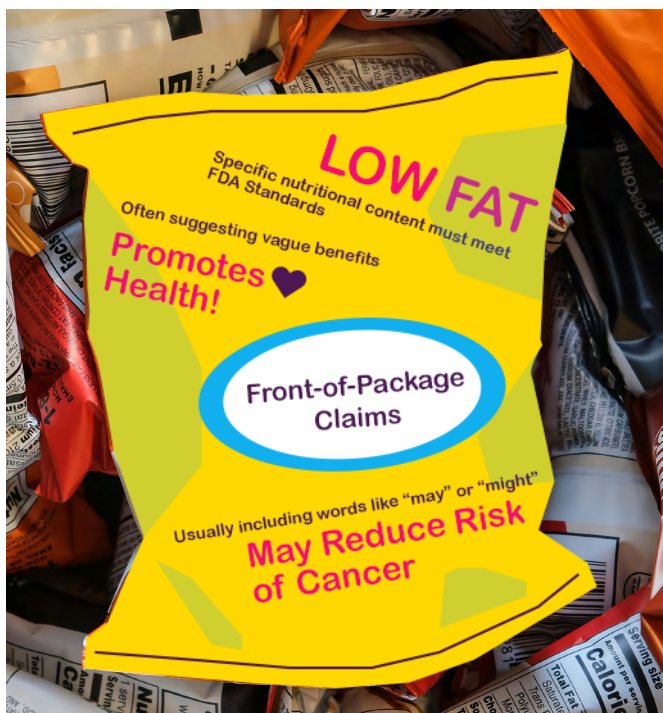
The food industry produces many coupons every year. It's important to remember that just having a coupon doesn't mean that the item is the best deal. Always compare prices to make sure you are getting the best value.

### Store Displays

- **Grouping Items:** In stores, you might see products like chips and salsa or marshmallows, graham crackers and chocolate displayed together. These displays encourage customers to buy multiple items, which might not be on sale.
- **End-of-Aisle Displays:** Many stores place food items at the end of aisles to attract your attention. These items may not be on sale and can tempt you to buy things you didn't plan for.
- **Strategic Placement:** Sugary snacks and cereals are often placed at children's eye level in stores. The healthiest and most affordable options might be on higher or lower shelves, so check those areas for better choices.
- **Cooking Demonstrations or Free Samples:** Stores often have demonstrations or samples to promote food purchases. Remember, these items may not always be healthy or on your shopping list.
- **Check-Out Lane Displays:** The items found at the check-out lanes are usually high in fat, added sugars or sodium. Try to avoid making impulse purchases while waiting to check out.

While avoiding impulse purchases, it's also smart to be flexible. If you find a good deal on something you use often, consider adding it to your cart. For example, if green beans are on sale, you might want to swap them for broccoli on your shopping list.

Be aware that online stores may use similar marketing strategies on their websites or apps. Always avoid impulse purchases, even when shopping online.



Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 scoop (30g)		
Servings Per Container: 30		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories		120
% Daily Value*		
Total Fat	1.5%	2%
Saturated Fat	0.5g	3%
Trans Fat	0g	—
Cholesterol	10mg	3%
Sodium	60mg	3%
Total Carbohydrate	5mg	2%
Dietary Fiber	2mg	5%
Sugars	1g	—
Protein	24g	48%
Vitamin D	2mcg	Calcium 150%
Vitamin D	1mg	Potassium 100%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.		

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## Comparing Food Labels and Front-of-Package Claims

The nutrition facts label is the best way to check if a food item is healthy. Compared to marketing claims on the front of the package, the nutrition facts label provides unbiased information. However, food labeling rules were only put into place in 1990 by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Before that, food labels were optional and could make claims without much proof. In 1973, the FDA began requiring food manufacturers to provide evidence for information on food labels.

Many consumers find it hard to know how healthy a product is due to the marketing tactics used by food manufacturers. Front-of-package claims can often be misleading. However, understanding common types of claims can help you evaluate a product's nutritional value.

### Types of Front-of-Package Claims

- **Structure-Function Claims:** These statements describe how a food product might affect the body. They often suggest vague benefits, like “Helps maintain mental health” or “Promotes heart health.” If a claim is made, the packaging must state that the FDA does not approve or support the claim.
- **Health Claims:** These describe the relationship between a nutrient or food and a disease. They must be backed by scientific evidence and usually include words like “may” or “might.” For example, “A diet low in fat may reduce the risk of some cancers.”
- **Nutrient Content Claims:** These indicate specific nutritional content in a food item. They must meet the FDA's standards. Examples include terms like “low fat,” “low sodium,” “fresh,” and “good source.”

Whether you're shopping in-store or online, businesses use different marketing tactics to encourage you to spend more. Being aware of these strategies can help you shop smarter, save money, and make healthier food choices. Remember to use coupons carefully, avoid impulse buys, and compare front-of-package claims with the nutrition facts label.

## References

1. Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Examination of Front-of-Package Nutrition Rating Systems and Symbols; Wartella EA, Lichtenstein AH, Boon CS, editors. Front-of-Package Nutrition Rating Systems and Symbols: Phase I Report. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2010. 2, History of Nutrition Labeling. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK209859/>



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