

This article is from the AARP online magazine and all of us could probably benefit from the information. Times are financially hard and we all need to arm ourselves against marketing campaigns aimed at separating us from our hard-earned money. Use the money you save for school clothes, savings accounts and expenses that will be coming up. Talk to your children about these shopping tricks suppliers use and make it a game. Take them food shopping with you and let them see if they can find these tricks at the store. This may not only keep them busy, but start educating them about these practices and their future money management.



# 10 Tricks Grocers Use to Get You to Spend More — and How to Beat Them

All those special deals might not be all that special

by Bruce Horovitz, **AARP**, July 1, 2021 | Comments: 65



[En español](#) | During the pandemic, many concerned consumers developed the habit of spending less time in the grocery store. Before the pandemic, the typical shopper went to the store 2.5 times weekly and spent 22 minutes there on each visit. Now the typical shopper is going just once weekly — and remains eager to leave as quickly as possible, says Phil Lempert, founder and editor of [SupermarketGuru.com](#). As a result, some grocers are reaching deeper into their bags of tricks to get shoppers to stay longer and buy more. Here are 10 of the most effective of those tricks.

## 1. Making a display look like it's offering a special deal when it isn't

**How it works:** Consumers are accustomed to finding special supermarket promotions stacked on so-called “endcaps” at the very beginning and end of supermarket shopping aisles. But only about half the time are these products actually on sale, says Lempert. “Just because it's piled high doesn't mean they are selling it cheap,” he says.

**How to avoid the trick — but still save:** First, of course, you should read the fine print and see if the product is really on sale. Another option, says Andrea Woroch, a consumer savings expert, is to walk down the aisle to where the product is usually sold and [compare the price](#) with other similar options. That way you can make sure you're getting the most bang for your buck.

## 2. Displaying complementary items next to each other

**How it works:** Few supermarket displays are more enticing in summer than the ones that place fresh strawberries, whipped cream and pastry shells on the same display in the produce section. But this practice, often called “cross merchandising,” has one purpose only: to get you to buy items you weren't expecting to purchase at all, says Lempert.

**How to avoid the trick — but still save:** [Stick with your list](#). If you came into the store to buy strawberries, go with the strawberries — and bag the sideshow, says Lempert.

## 3. Placing essential items like milk and eggs in the back of the store

**How it works:** By placing necessities in the very rear of the store, grocery chains force shoppers to walk the entire length of the store — up and down at least two aisles — to get what they want. In the process, it's all too easy to be distracted by some other impulse purchase that catches your eye. These kinds of purchases account for nearly 50 percent of grocery store purchases, says Woroch.

**How to avoid the trick — but still save:** Don't run into the supermarket when you need only a few essentials like milk and eggs. Instead, says Woroch, consider picking those things up at the corner drugstore when you're picking up a prescription or some other necessities. Most of the time, she says, drugstores charge relatively fair prices for milk and eggs.

## 4. Spraying mist on vegetables to make them appear fresh

**How it works:** Many chains have installed pricey automatic misting devices that spray a light mist on things like broccoli, kale, and spinach to give them the appearance of freshness. This savvy ploy, however, can actually reduce the quality of the vegetables and even lead to [potential bacterial issues](#) from spray nozzles that are rarely cleaned, says Lempert. “It's one of the biggest food sanity nightmares in the store,” he says. On top of that, the water often soaks into the vegetables and makes them heavier — so you'll pay more for them, he says.

**How to avoid the trick — but still save:** Do not purchase any misted produce. “Misting does nothing to help produce that's already picked,” says Lempert. Instead, suggests Woroch, and particularly if it's not produce you plan to use immediately, it can be better to purchase frozen vegetables, because they don't lose their nutrients as quickly.

## 5. Sampling to encourage purchases

**How it works:** Who hasn't walked by the fresh bakery section of the grocery store and seen those bite-sized cookie samples (often individually wrapped post-COVID) that seem to be screaming your name. Don't take one. Not only is eating that sample an instant trigger to buy that cookie, but those who sample junk food spend an average of 60 percent more on junk food (cookies, chips and candy) at the grocery store than do those who don't take samples, says Brian Wansink, former director of the Food & Brand Lab at Cornell University.

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** This doesn't mean you shouldn't take any samples. In fact, Wansink encourages taking fresh fruit samples, like apples. Those who took apple samples in a Cornell study spent an average of 30 percent more on fresh produce, says Wansink. That's actually good, because not only is fresh fruit better for you than junk food, it typically costs way less, he says.

## 6. Eye-popping promotions placed in printed weekly circulars

**How it works:** Big grocery chains tend to print weekly circulars with coupons for tremendous deals that either land in your mailbox or get placed inside the local

newspaper midweek. It's usually best to ignore them, warns Trae Bodge, smart shopping expert at [Truetrae.com](https://www.truetrae.com). Because these promotions are intentionally dated to expire in just a few days, they often incentivize grocery shoppers to purchase stuff they don't want or need.

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** Instead of clipping coupons from the circular, Bodge suggests using [coupon apps](#) that will serve up specific coupons when you're ready to go to the store — not when the store is ready for you. (She likes the coupon apps Flipp, Dosh and Ibotta.)

## 7. Placing the refrigerated drink case at the very front of the store

**How it works:** Those cold single-serve drinks sure look tasty — and convenient — after spending an hour or so grocery shopping. And the case is usually placed right near the cash register, so you can't miss it. But think hard before buying that cold drink, warns Lempert. He was recently in a New York City grocery store where the \$2.99 single-serve cold soft drink was the exact same price as a six-pack of soft drinks on the beverage aisle.

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** If you're that thirsty, Lempert suggests, go back and get the six-pack and drink a can with some ice when you get home.

## 8. Multiple deals

**How it works:** Sometimes it's three for \$5. Or even 10 for \$10. Whatever you call it, it's rarely the deal it's made out to be, warns Woroch. For example, those signs that advertise 10 for \$10 typically fail to mention that you also can purchase one for \$1.

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** [If you need only one, well, just buy one](#) — and save the other \$9, advises Woroch.

## 9. Enticing shoppers with wonderful aromas

**How it works:** We shoppers are victims of our own senses — and the grocers all know that. This is why the bakery is often located near the front of the store, where the smell of fresh-baked cookies or hot bread is incredibly alluring. These cravings — set off by your senses — can cause you to buy stuff you don't really want, says Wansink.

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** Chew gum while shopping. That might sound silly, but it works, insists Wansink. If you have gum in your mouth, it's much harder for you to imagine the taste, flavor or texture of whatever you're smelling as you walk by the bakery. If you don't chew gum, trying sucking on a piece of hard candy — or even sipping on a bottle of water, he suggests. “Not only will this save you money,” he says, “but it may keep you from eating something you shouldn't be eating.”

## 10. Placing pricey stuff at eye level

**How it works:** Most grocery shoppers are lazy. Roughly 60 percent of the items we purchase at the supermarket are at eye level — or within 12 inches of it, says Wansink. That's why manufacturers often pay special “slotting fees” to have their products displayed at eye level, he says. “It's the front-row seats for people's eyes.”

**How to avoid this trick — but still save:** Look down. From a [pure savings perspective](#), the often-cheaper private label brands are typically placed on or near the bottom shelves. That's where you'll usually find the best deals, says Wansink.

*Bruce Horovitz is a contributing writer who covers personal finance and caregiving. He previously wrote for The Los Angeles Times and USA TODAY. Horovitz regularly writes for The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Investor's Business Daily, AARP Magazine, AARP Bulletin, Kaiser Health News, and PBS Next Avenue.*