

## How Does Your Supermarket Measure Up?

The first clue to a store's product quality can be found in looking at the establishment's organization and cleanliness. A business that cares about how the products are stacked and organized is probably as concerned about the foods sold as well.

### Produce section

- **Shoo, fly.** Look to see if there are fruit flies around. Their presence will tell you if there are any spoiled or overripe fruits.
- **Avoid buying fruit with any bruises or fuzzy navels.** Bruises and brown spots on fruit are pathways for bacteria to enter.
- **The harder, the better.** While most people like to buy fruits that are a bit ripened, buy the more solid products and let them ripen at home. If a food is decomposing and soft in the store, it is more likely to have bacteria.



### Deli

- **Make it your last stop.** The deli/fish/meat section should be the last stop. Shoppers should pick up the dry goods first, and then head to the produce and meat sections on their way out so that the food doesn't warm up.
- **Shop close to home.** You should really shop somewhere that's at the most 15 minutes to half an hour away from home. Don't buy your meat and drive them all over town while you run other errands. If you're going to be out a little bit longer, get a refrigerated case and throw that in the trunk for those refrigerated items.
- **Smell test.** Any off odors you smell near the deli area indicates that the products are not fresh. You don't want to smell the "sour mop smell"—big turn off.
- **Bright red meat.** Meat should be bright red, and the paper underneath it should be clean as well. The meat has to be a bit bloody and shouldn't be discolored.
- **Avoid pre-marinated products.** In some supermarkets, when poultry or meat reaches a certain point and starts to get brown, they marinate it in soy sauce, add a little ginger, and it becomes "gourmet." This disguises the discoloration. It really is better to buy fresh meat and marinate it yourself.
- **Seafood on ice.** Everything in the seafood area should be on ice. Fish tends to spoil easily, so it needs to be kept as cold as possible. Also, cloudiness in the eyes of the fish indicates that deterioration has begun.



- **Avoid cross-contamination.** There also should be separation columns between fish and beef. Blood or juices from raw product should not get on cooked foods. Always make sure your raw meat products are double wrapped.
- **Check out the food handlers.** The food handlers provide some clue to the cleanliness and quality of the store. Look at their uniforms or aprons—are they nice and clean? Are they wearing a hat or a hairnet? Also, look at the slicing machine and counters or work surfaces. Be careful that the same knife doesn't cut beef and then work on fish.
- **Clean gloves.** Gloves do not guarantee that food is not contaminated. They can actually provide a false sense of security. They have to be clean as well. It's not a good habit for food handlers wearing gloves to touch hair, to pick up garbage, and/or to scratch themselves, etc.

### Canned foods

- **Visual check.** Make sure the can is in good shape and that the label is nice and clean. Check to see that there are no water or grease stains or any indentations.
- **Avoid puffy cans.** Stay away from a can that has any kind of puffiness, because that increases the likelihood of botulism. NEVER BUY discounted bloated or rusty cans.
- **Don't pull tabs.** Make sure the pull tabs are attached. If somebody has lifted the tab, you want to stay away from that product.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.** When you do open the can at home and something bubbles out, or if you notice any mold or any unusual smell, don't put your finger in to taste. Throw it out.



### At home

- **Wash with cold running water.** Wash your fruits and vegetables before using them or eating them. Just because fruits and vegetables look nice and clean, remember that a lot of people come through the supermarket, and most people like to feel their fruit and vegetables and don't always buy them.
- **Don't use detergent.** Cold running water will get off 99 percent of any residue that needs to be removed from a product. Residual detergent could cause allergic reactions in people sensitive to chemicals that they normally don't ingest.
- **Don't turn the sink into a tub.** When washing fruit and vegetables, do not fill up the sink like a bath tub and put everything into it. Wash in a strainer and let the cold water run over.
- **Peel!** Peel the fruit's skin if you're still concerned about residue and are not satisfied with your washing.



- **Check your own refrigerator.** The temperature in the refrigerator should be 41 degrees or below and the freezer temperature should be 0 degrees or lower.
- **Wash your own hands.** Wash hands for 20 seconds, which is about the same amount of time as singing “Happy Birthday” to yourself twice, or reciting the ABCs. Make sure to get around the finger tips and cuticles where most dirt or bacteria is found.

Source: Dateline NBC, Jeffrey Nelken, food safety expert.

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