The research is plain when it comes to eating. The amount you eat from a bag or a bowl is dependent on the size of the container. Researchers gave people a large or a small bag of candy and told them to eat all they wanted. People left about the same amount in each size of the bags, which means they ate far more from the large bag. Do you realize that the same effect is in play when it comes to shopping?

According to the 2012 Shopper Engagement Study by Popai, a trade association for the marketing and retail industry, the number of shoppers who made impulse decisions in the store climbed to 76 percent, up from 70 percent in 1995. Not surprisingly, more than half of all people surveyed — 57 percent — often spend more than planned.

Grocery stores are one of the main places people overspend, with appealing food and beverage aisles that lure in even the most budget-conscious shoppers.

Have you noticed that shopping carts — and the store aisles that accommodate them — just keep getting bigger and bigger? Studies show that shoppers buy more with a bigger cart than they do with a smaller cart, which looks full more quickly. So a larger cart actually prompts more impulse buys (and many of them not so healthy).

Our local stores provide three different sizes of receptacles to shop with — a large cart, small cart and hand carry basket. Match your cart to the size of your shopping list. And if you have only a few items, use the hand carry basket.

Other ways to curb impulse buying is to follow the time rule. If you wander around the store for an hour or more, it is guaranteed that you will find something to buy. Set a time limit for your shopping. When the time elapses, go to the front and pay for your groceries. You’ll be less likely to buy things you don’t have on the list.

Don’t shop when hungry. When you are hungry, everything in the store looks great. Candy, chips, deli items and cookies add to the cost of your grocery bill, but provide little nutritional value. Make sure you eat before you take off to the store.
The same thing goes for when you are upset. Shopping makes us feel good, so when you are feeling blue or sad, the tally goes up easily.

Stores are arranged to encourage impulse shopping. If you go down each aisle, you’ll find things you want to buy. Only shop those aisles that have something you need. Also, shop the perimeter of the store. Most of the basics are out on the perimeter. There are lots of impulse items in the middle and a lot of junk food.

Another time-tested way the grocers can sell you on an item is to offer samples. We taste and we enjoy, which leads to an impulse purchase. In fact, some of us feel almost obligated to purchase when there is a nice person handing out those samples. Enjoy the samples, but don’t feel pressured to buy.

Impulse buying can add to your grocery bill. Make sure you get what you need, but don’t fill your basket with impulse buys.

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