

Last week the Halifax Board of Health hosted the first in a series of health promotion presentations and programs. Prevention, promotion and education are part of Protection for Public Health.

We had the privilege of having Julianne McLaughlin talk about how to be a smart shopper at the supermarket. Julianne is a Board Certified Holistic Health Practitioner. She is smart, engaging and funny!

She began by telling us about the clever and carefully planned strategy of a supermarket's layout. What is always near the main entrance? Produce, right? And isn't that the good stuff? The bakery is right there, also, tempting us with delicious smells of baked goods and nicely packaged cookies, cakes and breads. She explained the reason for the produce at the entry. We place a few items from that department, and usually in that top section that we think is for toddlers. We are grateful for it so that our produce does not squish under the other stuff. Right? That "seat" was built just for the toddlers, wasn't it? As soon we place the fruits and vegetables there, we have the visual for the remainder of our journey through the store that we have some healthy stuff! We have done well for ourselves and our family! So, then it is okay to continue the journey to other zones for other stuff.

And isn't it usually quite a journey? We can so easily get side-tracked. How does that happen? Julianne then explained the psychology of the shelves. In the middle, at eye level for most adults, is the "bulls-eye" zone. Some retailers even pay a fee to have their product in this zone! (Talk about prime real estate!) That is the place where our eyes are distracted by the latest and greatest. Hmmm...maybe we should try it.

Below the bulls-eye, and right out in the aisle, in those cardboard display cases, are items aimed at children. Apparently, supermarkets love whining begging children. Many a time I have seen them get their way!

At the top of the prime location are the gourmet items. They are usually costlier, too. I see the word "artisanal" more often. Everything delicious is hand crafted. Does it taste better? You won't know until you try it and they are hoping you will. Are the ingredients better or is it healthier? You won't know without reading the ingredients and the nutrition labeling. I know, that takes time, but it is worth the time to do so.

On the very bottom are the bulk items. The already savvy shopper is willing to look around and literally bend over for lower costs.

As Julianne talked about supermarket strategy, the woman behind me said, "I didn't know that! This is interesting!" That was my reward for arranging the presentation and Julianne's reward for sharing useful information.

Shop with awareness. Bring a list. It is okay to consider those gourmet items but read the ingredients, know the unit price and decide if it is worth it. Make the decision with awareness.

You probably know that you should not go food shopping when you are hungry. If you do, that is the time to get in and out quickly, grabbing what you must and get home safely before you spend, spend, spend and buy junk!

Shop the perimeter, getting produce and lean meat. Venture into the danger zone of the tempting aisles only with your list and stick to it! Lastly, visit the frozen food section for some vegetables to have on hand for when you don't have fresh produce.

Julianne also brought some food items to demonstrate good and not-so-good choices and the effect of graphic design/packaging. The package of microwave popcorn was clearly the bad choice compared to the simple brown paper bag that can be used for popping corn in the microwave, sans chemicals and grease. The box of individual packets of oatmeal had a heart on it to symbolize heart healthy. While it is true that oatmeal is a water-soluble fiber and is considered to be healthy and "heart smart", sugar is the second ingredient! After that comes natural and artificial flavor, caramel color and then added vitamins.

We were introduced to a couple books that day also. One was *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* by Michael Moss. This book explains how addictive these ingredients are for so many people and how the food industry knows it and is playing us for the fool. We pay for the food and then we pay for the health consequences and then we go back for more!

The other book we saw that day was *Ingredients: A Visual Exploration of 75 Additives & 25 Food* by Dwight Eschliman. "Setting the record straight on the controversial and fascinating science of chemical and synthetic additives in processed food—from Twinkies and McNuggets to organic protein bars and healthy shakes. What's *really* in your food?" Good question!

Julianne recommends eating a fruit and vegetable with every single meal. Yes, every single meal, even snacks. Think about that. By the time you have eaten, say, an apple and a carrot, do you even need anything else for a snack?

The savvy shopper is the informed and aware shopper, making good choices for good reasons. We are all influenced by appearances. We do not have to be controlled by them.

Be savvy.

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