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Mind Games in Aisle Five

IN THE SUPERMARKET, YOUR PURCHASE DECISIONS ARE OFTEN SUBCONSCIOUS—AND RETAILERS ARE FULLY AWARE OF THAT FACT. USE THIS MAP TO RESIST THEIR TRICKS. BY RACHEL MELTZER WARREN, R.D.



5 DON'T BE BLINDED

Costco's high ceilings, cold lighting, and pallets all scream "cheap," says Lindstrom. And while club stores do offer plenty of savings, not every item is discounted. ► **FIGHT IT** Check the unit price, to the left of the total cost. You'll quickly see if that jumbo box of oatmeal is a better buy than your local market's smaller package.

1 DOWNSIZE YOUR VESSEL

"The size of a shopping cart sends an indirect signal," says Martin Lindstrom, author of *Buyology: The Signal: "Fill me."* With a big cart, you feel as if you're spending less and may be more apt to toss in that pillow-size bag (or three) of chips.

► **FIGHT IT** Grab a basket. Carrying it is a pain, which is good—that bit of extra effort will deter you from buying more than you need.

2 BEWARE OF THE SAMPLES

"We are conditioned to want to reciprocate when we're given things," says psychologist Kit Yarrow, M.D., author of *Decoding the Mind*. "Often that means we end up buying something we maybe liked but didn't love."

► **FIGHT IT** Never commit to buying an item while it's still in your mouth. If you're still thinking about that lobster mac 'n' cheese when you're ready to pay—and are willing to walk back to pick it up—go for it.

3 BYPASS THE BUFFET

If you eat at the store, you'll spend more. "Increasing your 'dwell time' in a store makes you likely to buy up to 10 percent more," says Lindstrom. Prepared foods have a higher profit margin, says Yarrow.

► **FIGHT IT** If you need to eat before you shop, go with lean protein and fiber (a salad with grilled chicken or a bowl of turkey chili). You'll stabilize your blood sugar and stay satisfied and focused.

4 STICK TO YOUR LIST

A store's app will alert you to sale items, but be careful. "Some apps can figure out the area of the store you're in and, using factors like your shopping history, give you a coupon," says Joseph Turow, Ph.D., author of *The Aisles Have Eyes*. That coupon's not such a great gift if the discounted item is junk.

► **FIGHT IT** Make a decision. Use app-supplied discounts only for items you planned to buy.



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NO, SERIOUSLY, STICK TO THE FREAKING LIST

Speaking of Costco, know that buying a membership to a store keeps you loyal, says Yarrow. You might overspend to "get your money's worth." Marketers use your cards to collect data and offer incentives that encourage you to buy more, says Turov.

FIGHT IT Keep your receipts and track your savings to see if a membership is really worth the fee.

7

IGNORE THE ENDCAPS

That fancy display at the front of an aisle? Customers often erroneously believe the products placed there are on sale, says Yarrow. An enticing endcap also makes you 17 percent more likely to walk down that aisle, says Lindstrom.

FIGHT IT Check the signs. Is there a discount? If so, then is it worthwhile to you? Don't let an in-your-face display distort your judgment.

8

DON'T FALL FOR THE WARM FUZZIES

High-end stores put produce in baskets and display freshly baked goods right where you walk in. "If you're met with tuna cans collecting dust, you'll perceive the entire store and its products as past their expiration date," says Lindstrom.

FIGHT IT Fresh doesn't always mean good for you. Store-baked cookies are still cookies. If you're feeling impulsive, ask yourself: "Can I eat well this week without buying this?" Answer honestly.

THE SNACK CHECKOUT

Dietitian Chris Mohr, Ph.D., R.D., identifies some hits and misses near the register.



GUM

"Chewing sugar-free gum is a great way to fill the void of snacking on sweets without calories," Mohr recommends.



JERKY

It has protein, which will fill you up. Plus, it's one of the few snacks in the checkout area that isn't sugary.



GRANOLA BAR

Choose one that has a few grams of fiber and at least 10 grams of protein, says Mohr. Otherwise it's a not worth it.



CHOCOLATE PEANUTS

"They're not something I'd suggest every time," says Mohr. The peanuts provide protein, but the chocolate is sugar-loaded.



CANDY BARS

Most of these things have the same amount of sugar as a soda. A few have peanuts, which offer a smidge of protein.



STARBURST

At least they're individually wrapped and sticky, which may keep you from eating them all, Mohr says.



WHITE CHOCOLATE

White chocolate, despite its name, has no cocoa beans and therefore no health benefits. This is sugar and fat in bar form.

