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Wednesday, Jan. 06, 2010 </p><p align="justify">Sick of high household bills? Shopping maven Stephanie Nelson, founder of the popular website couponmom.com has developed a method that she promises will slash your food and drugstore costs. She describes her techniques in her new book, The Coupon Mom's Guide to Cutting Your Grocery Bills in Half (Avery). TIME senior reporter Andrea Sachs visited with the thrifty author, who lives in Atlanta, Ga., during Nelson's recent visit to pricey New York City: </p><p align="justify">Is it really possible to cut your grocery bills in half?
Easily. My mantra is that strategic shopping isn't changing the way you eat; it's just changing the way you buy the food that you like. In the book, I use the example of pork chops costing \$5 a pound. But if you ask the butcher to cut up the pork loin, it's \$2 a pound, and for the same amount of money spent, you have more than twice as much food. I tried to bring out what I think are some pretty frugal practices that are so old they're new. Like washing your own lettuce. People are so used to convenience items they're not even thinking of them as convenience anymore; they're thinking of them as minimum requirement.
(See TIME's "It's Your Money" blog.)
◆ </p> <p align="justify">◆</p><p align="justify">Am I going to have to end up eating a lot of foods that I don't like?
There's got be a coupon for the items that you like if you're brand flexible. Maybe someone says, "I have to have Kellogg's Raisin Bran, I won't eat Post Raisin Bran." Even in respect [to] that kind of brand person, there is going to be a coupon for that particular brand at some time. So if it's that important to you to have that brand, recognize when it's at its lowest price and stock up on it. </p><p align="justify">Are you a big fan of buying in bulk?
In some cases. I've done a lot of research at wholesale clubs ◆ Costco, BJ's, and Sam's and did a lot of price comparisons. What I found is that it makes a lot of sense to buy in bulk when you're buying meat and produce. There were also some items that were less expensive to buy at the wholesale club than the grocery store, even when the grocery store has it on sale. My own personal items were things like egg substitute, frozen orange juice concentrate, and boneless chicken breasts that are individually frozen. All of those except for the produce were freezable items, and we actually bought a small freezer because it made sense to stock up once a month at the wholesale club on those bulk items. </p><p align="justify">Say I've never saved coupons before. I'm a total neophyte at this. But, the recession is here. How do I start?
I would recommend this no-clip coupon system: saving the entire circular from the Sunday paper, writing Sunday's date on it, and saving them in a box. [Before I go shopping] I sit down with my stack, and in 10 minutes I can cut out just the ones I need for that shopping trip. Even a neophyte could do that reasonably.
(Read 10 bizarre theories on saving and spending.)
◆</p><p align="justify">Where is the best place to look for coupons?
The Sunday newspaper is actually the source of 80% of grocery coupons. The next place to look is in the grocery store. The grocery store has coupons all over the place: in display ads, on the shelf and on packaging. Also, I've noticed more and more magazines are doing coupons. </p><p align="justify">Is the Internet a big source of coupons?
It's a good source, and a rapidly growing source. There are hundreds of grocery coupons you could print. People can go directly to the website of the products they like, and in many cases, print coupons for [those] products right from those websites. </p><p align="justify">Are there websites devoted to coupons?
I aggregate those on my website: coupons.com and smartsource.com [are two big ones]. </p><p align="justify">What if I'm very busy, and don't have enough time for this?
I think people have to be convinced of the value. If they end up saving \$50 at the grocery

store, they end up feeling like it's a good use of their time. </p><p align="justify">If I follow this path, will I find myself cooking more?
It will definitely save money if you fix more meals at home. We probably eat out once or twice a month. And it's more a preference thing. You like what you make at home and someone isn't sneaking in 300 calories of oil. </p><p align="justify">What part does list-making play into this?
Critical. Probably it's as important to make a list as it is to use coupons. I'm amazed at how many people don't use shopping lists at all, or if they do, they're inadequate. These are the same people who said they don't have time to use coupons, and I say, the amount of time you're going to save by making a good list will more than make up for the time. </p><p align="justify">Do all stores accept coupons?
They don't. There are some no-frills discount stores that do not accept coupons. A couple of wholesale clubs do not accept manufacturers' coupons, but they have their own store coupons. 95% of stores accept coupons. </p><p align="justify">Be honest: do you ever buy anything impulsively?
My one son loves these kinds of cookies that never have a coupon, but sometimes I just want to be nice. So, I see them on sale for \$2.50 I think, Oh, what the heck, I'll get him the cookies. But for myself, there's never anything that says to me, Oh, Stephanie get that, who cares if it blows your budget? It just really goes against my grain. The fun is figuring out how to get a better deal. </p><p align="justify">
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