

# Using a shopping list may aid food desert residents

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For residents of areas with limited access to healthy foods, also known as food deserts, multiple barriers exist that amplify the health risks of living in those areas. Likewise, risks for poor diet and being overweight or obese are also increased. Researchers from the RAND Corporation, however, found that use of a list when shopping among low-income, predominantly African-American participants living in a food desert was associated with a better-quality diet and lower weight. Their results are published in the current issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

A list when shopping can be a useful tool to limit extraneous purchases and counter the effects of marketing of unhealthy options. Shopping lists serve many functions for consumers, including acting as a memory aid, limiting [impulse purchases](#), and providing structure to encourage [good eating habits](#) and preserving financial resources. For food desert residents, in particular, use of a shopping list might also optimize purchases during trips to distant, less frequently visited stores. Throughout summer and fall of 2011, a study was conducted to assess the effects of shopping list use among 1,372 adult, primary household food shoppers from two food desert areas in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Data collectors went door-to-door to survey participants on socio-demographic characteristics, personal details such as height and weight, which were used to calculate [body mass index](#), and diet. Those enrolled in the study were primarily African-American (91%), female (74%), and had an income less than \$20,000 yearly (80%). For their time, survey

respondents were given \$25 for the initial dietary recall and an additional \$15 for a second diet recall one week later.

"Participants who reported always using a list had significantly higher dietary quality, were more likely to be female and older, and less likely to be employed or to have low or very low food security," said lead author Tamara Dubowitz, ScD, MSc, SM, a senior policy researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Individuals who reported always shopping with a list had slightly better dietary quality and slightly lower weight."

Although the conclusion that using shopping lists leads to lower weight is not justified by this study alone, the results confirm that using a shopping list may be very useful for high-risk, low-income individuals living in a food desert. Likewise, the benefits of using a list while [shopping](#) are enhanced by the fact that it is easily implemented and has practically no cost. The authors recommend future research to validate these findings.

**More information:** "Using a Grocery List Is Associated With a Healthier Diet and Lower BMI Among Very High-Risk Adults," by Tamara Dubowitz, ScD, MSc, SM; Deborah Cohen, MD, MPH; Christina Huang, MPH; Robin Beckman, MPH; Rebecca L. Collins, PhD (DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2015.01.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2015.01.005), *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 47, Issue 3 (May/June 2015))

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