



MIDWEST REGION

Grocery and Household Items for Free or Close to It

Toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, styling products, hair spray and moose, household cleaners & paper products (toilet paper, paper towels), foil, baggies, paper plates, napkins, razors, makeup (lipstick, mascara) body wash (men's and women's), mouth rinse, hand soap, lotion, band-aids, first aid items, shaving cream, cosmetics, light bulbs, pads/tampons, panty liners, candles, air fresheners, laundry softener/detergent, dish soap, room spray (Glade), toilet bowl cleaner, cereal, crackers, yogurt, shredded & block cheese (mixed response on cheese – with at least one couponer, from Michigan, not able to get cheese discounted), lunch meat (Oscar Meyer Deli creations), Manwich, tuna, canned goods (tomatoes), boxed side dishes (potatoes), frozen vegetables, condiments, salad dressing, chocolate, cake/brownie mixes, pudding cups, juice, crescent roll biscuits, canned goods, soup, noodles, noodle/rice mixes, pasta sauce, sauces (soy, hot, BBQ), mustard, boxed goods, pet food & treats, granola bars, snack items, fruit snacks, nut clusters, pretzels, fruit cups, coffee creamer (CoffeeMate), juice, drinks (Powerade, Propel, Capri Sun), drink mix (Crystal Light, Kool Aid), frozen treats (ice cream), soda pop, margarine, seasonings, instant coffee, candy bars, baby items (food & wipes), Ziplock and Glad baggies (usually less than \$.50/box), pens and post-it notes (around back to school time), office supplies such as paper and pens at Staples, contact lens solution

Grocery and Drug Store Chains Most Frequented

Acme, Aldi, Copps, Cub Foods, Dillons, Dominicks, Festival, Kroger, Jewel-Osco, Marsh, Meijer, Price Chopper, Hyvee, Giant Eagle, Fareway, Hen House, Apple Market, Marcs, Payless (Kroger), Pick n Save, Harps/Price Cutter, Rainbow, Oakridge Markets, Roundy's Rainbow Food, Save a Lot, Shop-N-Save, Sun Fresh, Thriftway, Target & Super Target, Woodmans, Big Lots, Dollar General, Costco, Shopko, CVS, RiteAid, Walgreens, Walmart (rarely – based on couponer response), Kmart (“only if it is an extremely great deal” – one couponer from Michigan), The Commissary (for military)

Good Deals – Single or Repeat Offers - & Stores for Deals

No repeat deals other than Catalina coupons at Jewel that “repeat” once a quarter or so.

For groceries, the items I can usually get for free are salad and produce, spices, meat, soda and for really cheap: milk and bread. On average, I pay about 20% under retail every month for everything – thanks to deals and coupons. Milk is difficult as you have to be creative in getting overage. Right now, I'm paying about \$1.50/gallon. At all my area stores: \$1.00 on Dole salads.

Experienced couponer from West Lafayette IN: “I don't purchase toothbrushes and toothpaste unless they're 'moneymakers,' and I still have enough stocked to last us for years... The more processed the food item, the more likely it will be gotten free or dirt cheap. Boxed potatoes, Manwich, cookies, candy bars, Chex Mix – those are my most recent 'freebies.'”



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Couponer from Wisconsin: “As a couponer, I tend to be able to get a wide variety of items for free. Of course, toothpaste and toothbrushes, shampoo, body wash, and other personal items. I have just started getting a hold on free groceries. Every week I can count on getting yogurt for free – that is pretty exciting for me! I have also been able to get salad dressing, Capri Sun, Oscar Meyer Deli creations, cereal, crackers, and lots of basic groceries.”

Experienced couponer from Nebraska: “I frequent Super Target, Walgreens, and ‘no frills’ supermarkets.”

Couponer from MidWest: “I frequent Jewel, Dominicks, CVS, and Walgreens. I get repeat deals on cereal and soda at all these stores, Sobe at CVS, yogurt at Jewel, and pain killers/cold remedies at CVS and Walgreens.”

Couponer from North Dakota: “The grocery stores in our area double coupons up to \$1.00. This is everyday – all the time. So our \$.50 coupons are worth \$1.00 which is great. One deal I seem to find almost every week is getting frozen vegetables for free or at least under \$.25/bag.”

Experienced couponer from Ohio who get the following items for free or mostly free: “Breakstone’s Cottage Doubles and Sour Cream, Nabisco 11 Calories Snack packs, Green Giant Steamers, Nescafe Sticks, General Mills Cereal, Yoplait yogurt, Ronzoni Smart Taste Pasta, Betty Crocker Potatoes, Cake Mix, Frosting, and Fruit Snacks/Fruit Roll-Ups/Gushers, Laura’s ground beef (in small quantities), Chex Mix, Yasikoba”

Costco: Couponer from India who lives in Kansas – “I have to do a lot of grocery shopping from the Indian store which seems pricey. For milk and fresh produce, I use Costco.”

CVS: I stockpile free dish soap which frequently is on sale – paired with the Homemade Simple coupon for Dawn. **Another couponer** – “Free toothpaste/toothbrushes at CVS.” **Couponer from Ohio** – “You’ll need the Extra Care Bucks (ECB) card for deals at this store. I can always shop at CVS with my total at \$20 to \$40 and – using coupons and ECBs – my total out of pocket is usually \$2 to \$5. I usually buy cereal, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, air freshener, mouthwash, lotions, body washes, candy, soda pop, and household cleaners there for next to nothing.” **Experienced couponer from Wisconsin** – “We get cheap diapers, wipes, deodorant, and sunscreen at CVS.” **Experienced couponer from Indiana** – “On a very frequent basis, I buy razors completely free with the \$2 Schick Disposable coupon – also CVS offers many items where, if you pay for the item, you get the full amount back in ECBs.”

CVS & Walgreens: Great for razors, shaving cream, body wash, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, and toothbrushes. **Another couponer** – “At Walgreens, you can snag multiple items for free using Register Rewards. It’s awesome because Walgreens has no tracking system, like CVS, that can limit the number of times you get free stuff.” **Experienced couponer from Illinois** – “Crest or Colgate toothpaste – with \$1 off coupon and Extra Care Bucks for CVS & Register Rewards for Walgreens = FREE.” **Experienced**



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couponer from West Lafayette, Indiana – “As long as you’re not picky about a certain brand, these are regular freebies after coupons and deals: razors, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, styling products, and body wash.”

RiteAid: Couponer from Ohio – “You’ll need the Wellness care from RiteAid for deals at this store. I do the video values on RiteAid’s website and use the store ad coupons and manufacturer coupons. Sometimes, I’ll have all three of these for one item so it will be free or close to it. I buy cereal, deodorant, laundry soap, soda pop, pain relievers, shampoo, conditioner, and household cleaners here.”

Experienced couponer from Michigan – “I can get a variety of items for free when I go to RiteAid and use the store coupon and manufacturer coupon – paired with rebates. I now buy all my personal items at this store: toothpaste, toothbrushes, hair products, tampons, pads, shavers, lotion, facial lotions and soaps, etc. I have set a limit for myself that, if I can’t get it for free or make money on it (using rebates), then I won’t buy it! This rule applies only to RiteAid and the products listed above. I also get diapers from RiteAid. I wish I knew RiteAid’s diaper deals three years ago.”

Walgreens: Sometimes but only if you have a nice cashier and the stores hasn’t run out of the items. Register Reward (RR) items are often completely gone by 3PM on Sunday – the first day of the sale. *[Another couponer in another region of the country said that Walgreens restocks mid-week.]* **Another couponer** – “For toothpaste, floss, and toothbrushes, the sale price is usually \$2.99ish with \$2.99 Register Rewards – Use a coupon and get overage. For Ecotrin or Bayer, the sale price is \$1.50 to \$2.00 for a bottle with the same amount for RR – Use a coupon and get overage.”

Walgreens: Couponer from Kansas – “Repeat deals which I access by going to the same store on different days or at least different times (to catch a different shift of employees). I have been able to purchase more than one free after RR item, for example – but not back-to-back. I am not able to stand at the register with multiple transactions and rolling RRs. My Walgreens has so many ridiculous restrictions on coupons that I can’t get the deals other people do. The biggie: We can’t use more than one ‘like’ coupon per transaction so if an item is Buy Two, Get RR, then I have to make do by using only one coupon on one of the items rather than two.” **Couponer from Michigan** – “Walgreens policy of using the number of Register Rewards slips on the equal number of items is irritating. If I have a \$1, \$2, and \$5 Register Rewards slips, I should be able to buy one \$8 item if I want.” **Couponer from Michigan** – “Walgreens does the most repeats – usually deodorant, body wash, haircare.” **Couponer from Grand Rapids, Michigan** – “Walgreens has the best deals on cheap/free personal care items. This usually involves several trips to several locations because one store never seems to have all the items I need for that week so it is hard to roll the Register Rewards coupons.” **Couponer from Ohio** – “This store often has shave gel (brand varies) for free and black olives for \$1 – a good price around here and we eat a lot of olives!” **Experienced couponer from Wisconsin** – “Don’t shop at this store unless you know what you’re doing! Check out iheartwags.com. Walgreens prices are generally VERY high unless the item is on sale and you have a coupon.”



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Dollar General: This store's clearance section is wonderful!

Giant Eagle: Great for toothpaste & toothbrushes. **Couponer from Ohio** – "Giant Eagle (my favorite): Ronzoni on sale for \$1.50, with a \$.75 coupon (doubled, usually printable at Ronzoni's site) = FREE; Sargento Cheese on sale for \$2.00 with a \$.75 coupon (doubled) = \$.50 for shredded or sliced cheese; various brands of toothpaste/toothbrushes go on sale for \$1.50 with a \$.75 coupon (doubled)= FREE; Hillshire farms lunchmeat on sale for \$3.50 with a \$.55 coupon (doubled) = \$2.40; various cereals on sale for \$2-\$2.50 with various \$.55/1 coupons (doubled) makes cereal around \$1.00; Carolina Rice often on sale for \$1.00, and there are often \$.50/1 coupons available making it FREE."

Aldi: Experienced couponer from Wisconsin – "I never buy anything at regular price except at Aldi. If it is not on sale or I have no coupon, then we don't buy." **Experienced couponer from West Lafayette, Indiana** – "This store has excellent deals, quality produce, and cheap milk."

Aldi & Meijer: **Couponer from Grand Rapids, Michigan** – "I get turkey burger, sausage, and produce at Aldi because it's cheaper than Meijer."

Big Lots: **Couponer from Ohio** – "I will buy laundry detergent and other household items at Big Lots if there are no good sales/coupons when I need certain things."

Copps: I often get free milk at this store with cereal purchase.

Dominicks: **Experienced couponer from Chicago** – "I will occasionally shop at Dominicks but try to avoid this store at all cost due to HORRIBLE customer service and coupon policy unless a deal is just too good to pass up."

Giant Eagle: **Couponer from Ohio** – "I always shop at Giant Eagle. You will need a Giant Eagle card to get the deals. This store doubles coupons up to \$.99, and you earn \$20 off a gallon of gas for every \$50 spent (which also includes prescriptions you buy there). This store will let you add up the total for 90 days before it expires so I usually get a free tank of gas up to 30 gallons every couple of months. Giant Eagle also has Catalinas for buying certain items each week in a single transaction. So, between the sale price, coupons, and Catalinas, items can be very inexpensive!" **Couponer from Ohio** – "At Giant Eagle, we often get frozen vegetables, yogurt for \$.50 or less (in a six pack), and individual yogurts for \$.25 to \$.30. Ice cream is \$2.00 and under. Snacks are \$1.00 or less per box. Giant Eagle doubles coupons up to \$.99 which helps a lot." **Experienced couponer from Ohio:** "Giant Eagle has Rizion Smart Pasta on sale for \$1. Used with the \$.75 or \$1 off coupon, you get the pasta free plus overage as Giant Eagle doubles and allows overage. I did the deal six times."

Fareway: I get a lot of pop, yogurt, lunchmeat, cheese, frozen foods, canned goods, etc. – great prices on these items at this store combined with coupons.

Hen House: **From a couponer in Kansas** – "This store doubles – and I get a lot of free or extremely cheap groceries there."



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Hyvee: Great deals on Sara Lee bread.

Jewel & Dominicks: Cereal for \$0.25 a box - good stuff, too - Dominicks just ran a buy four save \$4 and had a Catalina deal that was running with it...I purchased 36 boxes and ended up paying about \$6 out of pocket and that included 12 boxes of Kashi w/out a Catalina attached...fun times! In Illinois, Dominicks allows us to use expired coupons which makes my coupon collection almost unmanageable, but it's totally worth it when I can stock up like this! Pretty much unless my stockpile has gotten to the point of desperation, I won't pay more than a \$.50 a box for cereal these days...and typically a lot less! Yogurt can be purchased for super cheap when Catalinas are running or just really good sales combined with coupons (and Dominicks has coupons on their savers card that you can stack paper coupons with as well).

Jewel: Often runs a Catalina deal on Orville popcorn that is either super cheap (less than a quarter out of pocket) or sometimes even a money maker - we have so much popcorn and have donated so much it's crazy! ! This store also has great ice cream Catalina deals where you pay under \$0.50 for a container of Breyers - or sometimes even make money on purchasing ice cream. **Experienced couponer** - "I do Catalina coupon shopping at Jewel: The deals are always changed - different items, for example, from the same food product manufacturer. A few weeks ago, ConAgra offered Chef Boyardee and Banquet meals as part of a Catalina - then more recently different products from ConAgra were offered."

Jewel-Osco: This store, in Chicago, does some amazing Catalina deals, so although the items change with the deals, I can often get all the sauces and marinades for free. Also, cereal is a constant freebie. Other regular deals: Suddenly Salad, chips, popcorn, yogurt, etc.

Kroger: I almost always seem to be able to get free salsa, hot sauce, yogurt, sports drinks/flavored drinks, and frozen vegetables during sales in which you buy 10 items and get \$5 back. **Couponer from Michigan** - "This store doubles up to \$1.00." **Couponer from Indiana** - "Ronzoni pasta - \$10/10 sale paired with a \$.50 off coupon which doubles at my store = FREE." **Experienced couponer from Illinois** - "Rotini pasta with \$1 off coupon = FREE."

Meijer: I wait for liquid CoffeeMate to go on sale for 10 for \$10 or \$.99 and then I use \$.50 coupons that double for FREE CoffeeMate! I watch for baby wipes, Lysol products, Ziploc products, and candy bars to go on sale and get them for free or next to nothing because Meijer doubles and I love it! **Couponer from Michigan** - "Great deals on snacks and Lysol is often half-off." **Couponer near Grand Rapids, Michigan** - "Our Meijer stores do not double coupons so that is a bummer. But they do have store coupons that can be stacked with manufacturer coupons. During sales, this means cheap and even free groceries, usually non-perishables." **Couponer from Indiana** - "Repeat deals on Warm Delights and on Green Giant/Freshlike/Steamfresh veggies - a \$10/10 sale with the 11th free & paired with a \$.50 off coupon which doubles = FREE + a moneymaker." **Experienced couponer from W. Lafayette, Indiana** - "Meijer does Yoplait cups (6 oz) for \$.40 regularly. Sometimes it lines up with a Catalina. Throw in a couple of coupons, and it's an awesome deal." **Couponer from Ohio** - "Meijer runs a TON of Catalina deals. They are almost always paired with sales, have manufacturer coupons available, and sometimes Meijer



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coupons too. Meijer is a General Mills & Kraft type of store. They run promos on that stuff ALL OF THE TIME.”

Meijer, Payless (Kroger), and Marsh in Indiana: All occasionally do \$2/gallon of milk and \$1/dozen eggs. Sometimes Payless will do \$.99/half-gallon of milk. We save by eating seasonally too. The front page of the Meijer ad usually has some awesome deal on whatever produce is in season. Payless sometimes has produce on the front too. Asparagus in season can be almost as cheap as carrots, and peaches are cheaper than apples at the right time of the year – you’ve just got to wait for it.

Pick n Save: Couponer from Wisconsin – “All for free very often: Yoplait yogurt, Snyder pretzels, Ken’s salad dressing, Marshall napkins – and \$.50/box or less: Kellogg’s and General Mills cereals and Kashi cereal and crackers.”

Pick n Save and Copps in Wisconsin: These stores double on Wednesdays. FREE with double coupon: Daniamis/Activia/Light & Fir 4-pack yogurt at 2/\$4, Ken’s Salad Dressing at \$2, Ronzi pasta at \$1 when on sale, which is often – and only: \$.39 for Capri Sun at \$2.39 and \$.50 for Fruit Chillers at \$2.50.

Roundy’s Rainbow Foods in Minnesota: Double coupons on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Roundy’s rewards card comes with cash back offers, free items with purchase, gas rewards at BP, etc.!

Target & RiteAid: Second-generation couponer from Michigan – “Target was my favorite drug store chain, but, since becoming a Hip2Save fan, RiteAid has become number one.”

Target: I get a lot of paper products/cleaning items and cat food and treats – great prices on these items at this store combined with coupons. **Couponer from South Dakota** – “At Target, I have problems getting my coupons to stack and, even if I just use a single Target coupon, it will often beep and say ‘item not found’ when I indeed get the item. **Couponer from Kansas** – “Also this store is great for using a Target coupon along with a manufacturer coupon. I find a lot of clearance deals in which I can use both and score free deals.” **Another couponer** – “I can often get free light bulbs at Target.” **Couponer from Indiana** – “I haven’t really scored any repeat deals except for free Rayovac batteries in the dollar section of Target with a coupon.” **Couponer from Ohio** – “Our Target is not a Super Target, but often the few food items available will go on sale: cheese and juice for \$.99, and snacks for \$1.00 and under – combined with the store coupon and sometimes price matching – you can get some really cheap items. Target also seems to have deals on razors, shampoo, makeup and that kind of stuff so you rarely have much out of pocket cost.” **Couponer who lives near Grand Rapids, Michigan** – “I like Target but I get so much grief for using coupons there – it gets old. In some of the stores, all the coupons scan with no problem. At another store which is bigger and actually has a grocery department, almost every coupon (printed or from the newspaper) beeps as ‘item not found’ even when I have exactly the right items. And the store never wants to do coupons on trial-size items so, even after showing the cashier the coupon policy for adjusting the price down, the person looks at me like I am crazy.” **Intermediate-level**



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couponer from Iowa: “I have slowed down using Target as they have become very unfriendly regarding coupons.”

Walmart: I can typically do as many deals as I want in the same transaction. This store doesn't limit the number of like coupons per transaction or the number of transactions so I can use all my coupons at once if I like. **New couponer** – “I'm not a Walmart shopper... and refuse to shop there.” **Experienced couponer from Wisconsin** – “We get cheap produce and clearance bakery from Walmart.”

Intermediate-level couponer from Iowa – “I disagree with the regional food prices comparison study. The reason being is I live in Iowa and typically the prices posted for deals found at Walmart on Hip2Save are much lower than the prices I find at my local Walmart. Our Walmart has the weirdest coupon policy: If the coupon says you cannot double, I can only use one coupon for only one item. ”

Target & Walmart: Walk the back aisles of these stores. That is where they keep the best clearance items. **Experienced couponer from Illinois** – “Tide detergent with \$1 off coupon = FREE.”

Target & Walgreens: It's a good to prescription price-comparison shop! I like to transfer my prescriptions from Target to Walgreens and then back to Target to keep getting a \$10 gift card to Target!

Woodmans, Target, & Walgreens: Experienced couponer from Wisconsin – “I usually only do my grocery shopping at Woodmans which has the lowest overall prices. As far as food goes, I don't generally get much for free. Our grocery stores don't really run great sales. If they do, it's just for one or two items, and I don't have time to go from store to store. I get my household/personal items from Target & Walgreens.”

The Commissary: Experienced couponer from Chicago – “I can almost always get sauces and marinades free at the Commissary with coupons. But the constant freebie is health and beauty care items, I would say. I would never pay for any of those. Great for razors, toppings (such as pasta sauce and steak sauce), marinades, cleaning products, snacks – and this store has been meat prices than other stores in the area.”

Grocery and Household Items Not Discounted or Barely Discounted

Meat and fresh produce... also tortillas, bread, milk, organic poultry, and pepperoni.

I am usually able to buy produce on SALE – but can't get it further discounted. There is little which I EVER pay full price for. Dairy and baked goods are hit and miss, especially since I prefer organic dairy products.

Sometimes I can find coupons for Dole salad mix – but never any coupons for bulk produce.



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I have a tough time getting toilet paper and paper towels as cheap as I would like. We prefer real butter but coupons for this item are few and few between. My favorite tea bags – Lucianne – never seem to have a coupon!

Hard to get deals on deli items, Jif peanut butter, Bounty paper towels, and Charmin toilet paper.

The more raw and exotic the grocery item, the less likely it will be cheap. Like an eggplant or a starfruit – you're paying full price!

It's rare to find a coupon for produce, bagels, English muffins, juice – once in a while I find a Motts juice coupon.

I have gotten anything from soap and shampoo to bacon for free. I think toiletries seem to be the easiest to score for free. I NEVER get produce for free. Does anyone? Toilet paper always seems to get me... I wait for a sale and good coupons and the coupons expire without ever seeing a great deal! I would love some free toilet paper.

I have been unable to find deals on trashbags and wish I could find better deals on soda, mineral water, nuts, and canned fruits/veggies.

Evaporated milk – My family uses a lot of evaporated milk, and it seems impossible to find it on sale. For everything else, there is usually a sale or coupon to use.

I only buy the things I have coupons for. If there isn't a coupon – this momma ain't buyin'!!

Hidden Valley Ranch coupons/sales are hard to come by, and my husband refuses to try any other brand!

If it ain't cheap, we don't need it! My teenage son's protein bars – although I find a deal once in a while.

Experienced couponer: "If I can't get it cheap, we don't need it. I purchase things like meat and produce with my overages from the coupons."

Experienced couponer from Michigan: "Paper plates. Can't think of much I need that I can't at least wait for a sale to buy." **Experienced couponer from Michigan:** "Most stores in my area offer double couponing. I have to watch closely for rebates to make things free." **Another couponer from Michigan:** "I live near Grand Rapids and have been really couponing for about two months. Never really get great deals on produce, meat, pop, and Velveeta cheese." **Couponer from Grand Rapids, Michigan:** "There are not really any great deals on meat so I get most of that from Great Food for All or Angel Food which are discount grocery programs with local pickup locations. I probably get 80% of my meat through these two programs." **Experienced couponer from Michigan:** "Baby food, formula, coffee, milk...." **Couponer from Michigan:** "Prescriptions are never on sale. Our side of the State doesn't do double coupons so the "deals" I find online aren't as good. I get so excited and then bummed. Also, I hate to use Facebook to



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get deals. I don't want all that junk on my Facebook. We get very limited coupons in our local Sunday paper so I have to find a Detroit Free Press somewhere and they're often sold out (and there is no home delivery service in our area either)."

Somewhat experienced couponer from Indiana: "I purchase trial-size and full-size items with high-value coupons. I also get free items and samples by emailing companies and signing up for their email list."

Another somewhat experienced couponer from Indiana: "The only item that I'm unable to get at some kind of discount is fresh granola from Kroger (a personal splurge). I feel like most of the time anything else I can get cheaper with sales and coupons. My meal planning and shopping are based on sales prices and what I already have in my pantry."

Seasoned couponer from Kansas: "It is hard to find discounts on organic, healthier items, fruits, veggies, milk, and butter."

Couponer from Ohio: "It seems that there are rarely sale prices on specialty cheeses." Another Ohio couponer: "100% fruit juice." **Another Ohio couponer:** "I rarely find deals on milk, eggs, beef, chicken, and fish. If there is a coupon, it doesn't seem to get the prices down much at all, and generally the coupons I've seen for these items are not available in our area."

Couponer from Wisconsin: "I have found that coupons for Crisco do not come out often, when they do I stock up." **Another couponer from Wisconsin** has trouble getting "Torke coffee" on sale or with coupons.

Couponer from Illinois: "My major challenge is coming because we are building a vacation home in South Dakota where I know from previous visits that the price of groceries is MUCH higher than in Illinois where I reside. I anticipate that I will be continuing to stockpile in IL and carrying portions of this stockpile to South Dakota when we spend time there. In particular, staples are considerable higher in SD, even canned soups and pasta. The lack of chain stores doesn't help this much either as there is not as much competition. The one bright spot is that I know there is at least one Walgreens store where we are building and I do a lot of good deals at Walgreens. I must say that I hope the frequent buyer test program for Walgreens does not get implemented nationwide. I find that I usually do better at CVS with the ECB (Extra Care Bucks) and CVS has fewer rules than Walgreens does on item-to-coupon ratios, using RR (Register Rewards) s for like products, etc."

Couponer who lives in a Chicago suburb: "Groceries: Peanut butter (I buy the natural/organic kinds that use no additional oils/salts/etc); real maple syrup, honey, milk (unless there is a good Catalina for buy two cereals get a Catalina for free milk), produce (always watch for sales and do actually know what a better deal on most things are now, but coupons are very limited), bread - seems weird, but I have a very tough time finding good bread deals, parmesan cheese (we love the kind in the plastic containers near the deli section, but really I win every time I put them in my cart - \$3.50 is a good sale price...and



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then my husband uses about half a container at dinner...do you know how many boxes of cereal I could have bought instead?? Household items : I know I must just always miss the deals, but an item I pay way too much for is garbage bags. Also, sandwich baggies/freezer bags. Spices (like McCormick that are in the jars, not the kinds in spice blend pouches). ”

Experienced couponer from Chicago: “Hard to get discounted – Drano or similar product, produce, organic dairy products and meats, and children’s shampoo (the only health and beauty product which I can’t seem to get free.”

Tips for New Couponers

Be patient!! You don’t just ‘get’ this overnight.

My best tip: Don’t rush out to get every deal. You do not have to get everything at once. If you miss a deal, it will more than likely come around again. It’s not a big deal. Don’t overdo it.

New couponers should remember to take it slow. Sometimes it can get exciting when you see something on sale and you have a coupon for it, but that doesn’t mean you’re getting the best deal. More often than not, you can attain things for free either with some sort of store rewards program or even rebates.

Organization is a must! Have your entire list written out with necessary coupons before you get to the store.

Get organized! Don’t be afraid to try different systems. It took me about six months to figure out what works best for me.

Print off high-amount coupons in case you might find a sale because coupons often have a limited number of prints. Organize your coupons by types/brand/etc. and sort through sale ads and matchup coupons before your trip... this is especially helpful if you have kids and are in a hurry. Trade coupons with friends...let them know what you want and swap.

Like NIKE always says: Just Do It! Why wouldn’t you want to save money?!

Stockpile items when they hit rock bottom so that you can ride out the sales wave. Develop a price list and don’t overpay that price unless it is an emergency!

Don’t focus on the fact that you messed up and missed a \$2 Catalina coupon. Just think - even with overpaying \$2, you still paid FAR, FAR less than you would have at full price!

You CAN’T get every deal! So don’t waste your energy trying. When I first started, I remember feeling a sense of panic if I missed a sale or saw that one of my coupons had expired. DON’T WORRY: Deals almost always roll back around!



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You get a lot farther with cashiers if you are nice and happily express how excited you are to save money! NEVER be embarrassed about your coupons!

Always be considerate of the shoppers in line behind you at checkout. Let them know before they unload their cart that you may be a while with your mountain of coupons OR pay if forward by scanning their cart to see if you have any coupons to match items in their cart.

Ask a lot of questions!! Don't be afraid of looking ignorant. Many of the stores that have the BEST coupon deals also have many little "sticky" rules that are sometimes difficult to figure out. If you know someone who's been into this for a while, run your deal scenarios by this person first to see if he/she spots any 'red flags.'

Find a cheerleader!! My husband is very supportive of my super-couponing. I love to come home with bags and bags of deals and let him guess how much I paid. So find someone that you can 'brag' to about your steals and deals... it makes it all that much more rewarding!

Organize your coupons; stay on top of weekly coupon cutting, printing, sorting; carry your coupons everywhere!

Buy newspapers at dollar stores – as they're often cheaper there; buy coupons when there is a good deal; read, read, read forums.

Get a good organization system going and update it weekly; be prepared with lists; be flexible – often deals are sold out... you'll catch it the next time or trek on to another local store in the same chain.

Sort coupons and make plans after your kids go to bed. It requires lots of uninterrupted time.

I cut the coupons that I know I will use and leave the rest untouched until a sale comes and then I cut. I keep my inserts in dated files. I have a coupon organizer that attaches to the cart, and it is so much easier. I am going to get one for each store so that I can keep them all organized.

Have a game plan BEFORE getting to the store – that will save you a lot of time.

#1 Go to Hip2Save; #2 Buy gift cards on eBay for stores you know you will shop at; #3 Get the Target card and save 5% instantly on each purchase – then walk directly to customer service and pay it off.

Try to organize your coupons in a way that is easiest for you. I recently switched to a binder and feel more organized when I shop.

I use a coupon binder. It helps me because, as I cut out the coupon and put it in my binder, I often remember what coupons I have. So, when I'm in the store, I'll think 'I remember cutting out that coupon!' and there it is. Also take the binder with you everywhere. You never know when you are going to see a sale. Even if I don't think I will use it for a certain shopping trip, I will put it in the car just in case.



MIDWEST REGION

Don't let those coupons pile up. Clip them – or have your kids help you – and file them as soon as you can. Makes very light work for organizing!

Explore different methods of organizing your coupons. I'm a 'clip everything' gal with a binder but am evolving into a hybrid binder for good coupons – with everything else filed by insert.

I like to plan my trips ahead of time, comparing coupons to sales. I have an envelope to put all of the coupons in which I intend to use with my list on the front of the envelope. However, I always bring my coupon binder with me because I never know what I might find in the clearance bin!

Watch, listen, learn! Pay attention to the bloggers and what deals they are getting. I recommend that you go slowly – just one or two items per transaction until you really get it. Be patient! Remember, there is always a new sale next week.

Confidence is key. Be sure that you understand how each store takes coupons and use them properly. Don't clip every coupon. Clip only what you need or can get free and donate. But file the rest away for later use. Use your resources wisely. Ask friends and family to save their coupon flyers for you. Most of them are likely willing to help and you could reward them with a gift basket of products later.

Most important tip for new couponers: Know your coupon! Check the expiration date! Make sure that you are purchasing the right product, size, quantity, etc.!!!... Also, just because you see a good deal posted online, double check it, sometimes the coupon are not the right ones for the particular products which are being mentioned.

Follow one blog, and one store within that blog. Save the weekly coupon inserts. Ask friends/neighbors to give you their coupon inserts when they're done with them.

Buy a Sunday paper for the coupon inserts and cut everything out. You never know when you might want to try something new, especially if the deal is good enough; check out the online blogs, manufacturer websites, etc. Print those coupons out!!! Strategize with a friend... two heads are better than one.

Study the sales ads every week! The same item may be on sale at a couple of different stores. Use the store for the item where you can save the most including Catalinas, Extra Care Bucks (if you use CVS), store and manufacturer coupons. The item may be cheaper at one store but may not have Catalinas, etc. So do the math and pick the store that has the best deal.

Focus on one grocery store and one drug store to begin with. Learn how to organize all your coupons/receipts/rebates. What a bummer it is to purchase something for a mail-in rebate only to lose the sales receipt. Find a buddy to share in the coupon madness experience: Put the kiddos to bed and hit the stores for deals at night when stores are quiet and uncrowded.



MIDWEST REGION

Three tips: Organization – you need a system (coupon organizer, spreadsheets, etc.); Find your store – you need a limit (pick your favorite stores and do NOT drive farther than it's worth; Find your site – you need a website that keeps up with you and your deals... thanks Hip2Save ☺.

Stores generally offer rain checks for items that aren't on their shelves. This is great when there's a sale on something perishable like milk or yogurt. Stock up at the beginning of the sale. Then go back on the last day of the sale when they're all out and get a rain check so you can stock up again in 2-4 weeks.

Don't go overboard. If you have 20 tubes of toothpaste, do you really need one more?! I've had a hard time with this one, but I'm slowly down and it feels good. It's hard because I look at coupons as money. When I don't use the coupon, I view this as wasting 'money' – but I live in a pre-coupon taxed state so things are never free. Don't compare yourself to others. I see people gushing about getting great deals on Poptarts or whatever and I get tempted. Then I remember that I don't even like Poptarts! I also don't get the obsession with scrubbing bubbles cleaner, but to each his/her own.

Find a couple of places you like to donate to. I have a personal limit of three of the same personal care items to keep in my cabinet – any additional items that I bring home, which are free or moneymakers, go to a local food pantry and women's shelter.

I recycle envelopes for organized grocery shopping. I use one envelope for each store, which I plan to hit, and make my list on the backside – keeping the coupons inside.

I made two mesh coupon holders with Velcro closures – one for grocery coupons and the other for restaurant coupons. I keep these in the car because there are times I'm not expecting to use them but want them.

Get gas at Kum & Go on Sundays so you can get a free Sunday paper!

Regarding toiletries, I swear I haven't paid for toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, razors, feminine products, etc. in at least five years!

Couponing does take time, but how many jobs allow you to make \$30/hr and work from home?!

Know prices at various stores so you know when you're getting a good 'deal' and where to use your coupons; know various stores coupon policies (makes it so much easier when you have an issue with a cashier) and buy the smallest item allowed by the coupon.

Create a pantry and a gift closet so you are never running out in a panic and getting something at full price.

Stockpile as much as possible. When I first started, I didn't have much left over for stockpiling. But, after a year of doing it, there are many things that I don't even think of getting unless they're free.



MIDWEST REGION

Buy ahead so you can use sales and coupons to get the best deal. Don't wait until you need something, because for sure it will not be on sale then. Buying ahead works well for clothes too. Right now sweaters in my area are on clearance everywhere so, for \$1 to \$3/sweater, I can stock up! We are a family of seven, and I pay less than \$30-\$45/week for everything we buy for in the house – including two in diapers and all our clothes, food, and cleaning supplies. We buy at rummage sales too.

Have fun! I see a lot of people in aisles at the stores with coupons and I always smile or give them a nod - which typically leads to a fantastic conversation about deals in the store to watch out for - happened just this weekend when I was buying all of my cereal, I also learned about a great deal on 100 calorie packs - now I have snacks for summer hiking and zoo trips...and I only paid pennies for them total!

Make coupon friends, then you have a shopping buddy to help you save and keep you in check!

Follow blogs!! Find local grocery store blogs as they always have ad matchups and you can score super deals!!!!

Look for other ways to save money: Buy eyeglasses online for example.

Take a calculator along for minimum purchase deals.

Keep a price book. Don't buy a lot of something just because it's on sale or free! Make sure you like it or will use it! Plan your meals around what you have or what's on sale for the week.

Always check your receipt before you leave the store, and correct any issues with customer service (very helpful most of the time); it is a pain to come back and fix it after you have left!

If you think you're right and the cashier doesn't let you use your coupon, go to the store manager at the service desk or call corporate if you have no luck with the manager. In most cases, you will be right, and the employees are unsure. Also look for stores that double coupons. One more thing: Email your favorite manufacturers and let them know that you enjoy their products. I have gotten tons of coupons for free and high-dollar coupons that way.

If the store requires you to purchase a certain amount of items before any coupons can be doubled (i.e., \$25 total BEFORE coupons can be doubled), use your FREE product coupons to get to the total without having to spend out of pocket.

To get an idea of what you spend/save each year, save every receipt you have by month in Ziploc bags. I can't wait to see in January 2011 where all my money has gone....

Don't be brand loyal across the board; be willing to stock up on frequently used items; learn about store policies; befriend your cashiers.



MIDWEST REGION

I get two newspapers so I have double the coupons each week. Then, when I find coupons I want more of, I usually order them from thecouponhunter.com so I can stock up during a sale. Printable coupons are awesome!

New Couponers: Biggest Challenges

Trying to keep all the coupons straight, convincing myself to buy in bulk, remembering to use the coupons at checkout, and organization of my coupons.

Time to organize all the coupons, although it's relaxing when I do sit down and do it!

My biggest challenge is NOT making multiple trips into town in one week to get a deal and letting couponing take up so much of my time!

My biggest challenge is that there are NO stores in my area (Iowa) that double coupons.

My biggest challenge is that the shelves are empty by the time I get there.

Organization: I have a hard time keeping track of the "deals" each week and how to do them. I wish there was a printer-friendly way to print the posted deals. My other challenge is stockpiling coupons for my family. The RedPlum insert in my area is basically worthless. We don't get coupons everyone else gets. The RedPlum insert is only included in papers for home delivery so buying extra papers isn't helpful.

Deciding that it is worth my time to clip the coupon, and then deciding if it is worth it to buy a new/different product because of the coupon, when I'm not sure if it is a product we will like.

Trying to figure out which stores have the sales. I don't know about any CVS or RiteAid in my area.

Being able to use certain coupons at certain places. I know some places don't accept Internet coupons – or they don't accept the 'free item' Internet coupons.

New couponer from Indiana: "It's hard to figure out how many coupons I should use for a particular product. Many times I think I have clipped enough or printed them out online to find that I should have clipped more, especially to get some Catalina deal, Register Rewards, or Extra Care Bucks. I also discovered that my local paper does not have as many SmartSource coupons as a nearby larger town, so I've started buying two of the larger town's Sunday newspapers.

New couponer from Kansas: "It is hard to stay organized enough to know which products I need that I have coupons for, which stores I need to hit on which days, etc. I am also having a really hard time figuring out what my local grocery store's coupon policy is. My local grocery store is Dillon (a Kroger store). It seems some days they multiply coupons, and other days they don't. I need to figure out which days they do and ONLY SHOP ON THOSE DAYS."



MIDWEST REGION

New couponer from Omaha, Nebraska: “Being organized, not getting frustrated because I am often overwhelmed at what is on sale where and how to get the best deal. I have been ad matching for over a year and my Walmart does not require the ad to be presented so I would just take my list of matches and occasionally use coupons – but I have found that going to Target is much easier but my Target requires the ads so that is one more thing that I need to become more comfortable. We do not have Rite-Aid and CVS is being constructed now and should be open by midsummer. “

I often find it overwhelming to understand the deal scenarios and coupon codes.

Finding the coupons I need to fit my meal plan (dieting).

Making sure that I do ‘the deal’ the correct way so I can save my family the most money and organizing myself effectively to be able to do ‘the deal’ correctly.

I am new to couponing and LOVE the Target and Walgreens posts, but I am really struggling with grocery savings. I shop at HyVee and Fareway.

My biggest challenge is having the time and energy to do this with the kids in tow. Seems like when I get to the store, many of the items I want to purchase are out of stock.

Making sure that my coupons get accepted at the cash register. I tend to walk out and notice later that a couple of my coupons were not deducted on the receipt.

New Couponers: Questions

What are your best organizational tips for coupons? Do you buy things using a coupon if you don't need them, but it's a good deal?

What is the best way to organize coupons? I like the binder idea because I can take it with me when I find a buy I didn't plan on, but I have lots of people saving coupons for me and it seems I just keep dumping them in a bag. When I'm looking for them, I start the hunt.

How do you stay so organized with all your coupons? How do you find the time, if working full-time, to hit and get all the EXCELLENT deals? Did you take a class to get as good as you are?

Can you use two different manufacturer coupons on one item? Can you really use two coupons for BOGO (Buy One, Get One Free) deals?

Do you clip all the coupons? Can you use two Buy One, Get One Free coupons to get both items free?

How do experienced couponers know what coupons are coming out in the newspaper before the newspaper hits the streets?



MIDWEST REGION

Do I need to hit multiple stores for each shopping trip to get the best deals? And hit those stores exactly when the sale for each item is running? Doesn't that make for a lot of shopping stops? Does all this couponing really beat Aldi's prices?

Is it better to shop at one location, know it really well, and do your best with it – or is it better to have two or three locations to keep track of and rotate for the best deals? Do you recommend The Grocery Game website?

How do you fit couponing into healthy meal planning?

What/where can you find the best deals for summer traveling?

What are the pros/cons of your organizing method?

Do you actually get all your coupons ready BEFORE you head to the store?

If you have a manufacturer coupon, can you pair it up with a coupon that you pull off a product – or is this coupon also considered a manufacturer coupon?

How do you keep track of the weekly 'deals' at the different stores?

How do you track the price of products you buy regularly to make sure you are getting the best deal?

When is the best time to use a coupon – right when it is released or towards the end of the expiration date?

How can I get better coupons? My area (Ohio) never gets the high value, especially good coupons in the inserts.

What are good 'stock up' prices? One website I visited (although I didn't care for the format) noted which sales were stock opportunities.... a neat idea.

If you buy two items, can you use a Buy One, Get One Free coupon and a \$ off coupon on the same transaction? Also, if a coupon say \$5 off \$25, is the \$25 before or after taxes?

Are there stores that take multiple manufacturer coupons on one item?

How do you stock up and find deals on paper products, toilet paper, paper towels, etc.?

Do you have any brand loyalty or is price the most important factor?

How do you keep your couponing down to a minimum (clipping/printing coupons, searching for deals, planning your trip, etc.)?



MIDWEST REGION

How do you find time to do all the tasks that involve couponing? It's hard for me to find the time, and I don't always have all the coupons from inserts.

What's your system for maximizing sales/deals while minimizing time spent searching ads, sale flyers, and coupon inserts/websites?

What's a good blog for Walmart deals?

Do you really compare prices of the stores in the area to find a better deal? If so, how do you do it? Do you go to each store and compare prices or do you look at their store ads or something else?

How do you know if something is a good deal or an awesome deal so you can stock up? I'm trying to get some standards together like \$2/lb for meat being a good deal or \$1.50/lb for fruit, but it is hard to keep track of it all.

I find that the big binders get very difficult to manage. Do you have any ways that are a little simpler and easier but can hold lots of coupons?

Fairly new couponer from Chicagoland area: "I have been able to cut the family budget by more than 25% or over \$100/month – even though we pay an ugly, frustrating 10% sales tax on just about everything!!! I still feel like I spend too much time on the computer trying to see what deals are out there and matching up my coupons, internet ones and stores ones. As I try to compile a shopping list, I don't know if the product is in its low or high sales cycle. Could you post it in green if it's in its lowest price cycle, yellow if it is still pretty good, and maybe black if it is not so great at all? Deals near free could be in red."