

Living Well With Lupus - Kitchen Coping

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Part 1 Grocery Shopping



Living with lupus means adapting to various types of limitations, basically doing things differently than we did before the current flare up of symptoms. Grocery shopping does not have to be World War 3. There are simple steps you can take to conserve your energy.

The most obvious yet least often performed task is to make your shopping list based on the actual meals you plan to make that week keeping in mind the products stocked by the grocery stores you shop at most often. I keep a paper under a magnet on the refrigerator to write down items as I run out of that ingredient. My memory will not do the job by itself. Before going to the grocery store, organize the shopping list in the order that products are stocked on the shelves at the store you normally shop at.

I went to my local Loblaws, Costco and Food Basics stores and then I made a sketch of the store with the main items I shop for regularly marked on the floor plan and also where the public bathroom is for the inevitable emergencies. If your store does not have a public bathroom, I have found a short talk with the manager about lupus and the challenge it presents while shopping gets me permission to use the employees bathroom so that I can use it in a hurry when I need to. I have met many people who will not shop for a fear of bathroom emergencies. You can get a friend, child, family member to help make the sketch. Don't try to sketch them all in the same week. Give yourself time so that it is not a stressor but a stress reliever. The time it takes to make a sketch pays big dividends while doing the weekly shopping. After drawing the sketch, I made a new shopping list for each store in my computer with the products listed in the order they appear on the store shelves. This organized list replaced the scrap of paper on the fridge, and all I have to do is check off which items I need instead of writing them out. This saves the energy and time of writing it out as each item is used up through the

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week. I have one list for each store so that I do not have to think about where to find the item.

When extreme fatigue is our symptom of the day, with or without foggy thinking, having products listed in the order they appear in the store makes the shopping less stressful. You do not have to hunt for the items or get frustrated backtracking steps down aisles you have already walked. Use a shopping cart to lean on instead of carrying a basket. You can save time and energy by shopping one store only per week, for example, I shop at Food Basics one week for the items they offer cheapest in the product brands my family will eat, the next week I shop at Loblaws for items I cannot get at Food Basics or prefer their brand, the third week I shop at Costco and so on. Every 3 weeks I get to each store once saving time, energy, gas and ultimately dollars as well by decreasing waste.

Altering what we buy can be a big time and energy saver. I have difficulty holding tools for many tasks from cutting, slicing, etc. Chicken or beef that is cut up into "stir fry" strips eliminates the need for painful cutting and slicing. Washed and torn up lettuce ready to eat from the bag can make the difference between eating a healthy salad and giving up because one is too tired to wash and tear up the greens. Baby carrots are ready to go and don't require painfully holding a vegetable peeler and slicing by knife. Canned, fully cooked, real chicken breast comes in large chunks not mashed up flakes in a can about twice the size of a tuna can. These items did not increase the overall food bill and have simplified cooking. It is cheaper and healthier than eating out and saves the energy for other things.

When you absolutely cannot do the shopping yourself, allow yourself the grace to accept it and have the wisdom and courage to ask for help from family or a friend, or use a grocery service like *Grocery Gateway* that brings the groceries to you after ordering by telephone or on the internet. Some churches also help with volunteer rides or shopping helpers if you ask. The key is you have to ask as these services will not be advertised because of the huge demand for volunteers. Meals on Wheels can be another help with frozen, balanced meals. They have menus based on many different ethnic meal plans. If you are a senior citizen, there are other organizations that provide low cost rides or help with meal preparation.



Part 2 Meal Preparation

In Part 1 Grocery Shopping I mentioned pre-cut meats and pre-washed/cut vegetables. I want to take that further and include other items my family uses to ease meal preparation. These include prebaked, vacuum-packed whole wheat pizza dough/crusts, multigrain pasta and bread machine mixes, bulk pack hamburger, chicken parts, precooked roasts, shredded broccoli/vegetable mixes in the salad section which can also be used for stir fry, precooked bacon. I find cooking in bulk easier. On a day when I am feeling good, I cook a large batch of something and freeze the extra in individual meal size portions which only need to be microwaved on a day when I do not feel well. I reheat the number of meal size portions based on how many people will be eating at that meal.

Tools of the kitchen arena are just as important in energy conservation as the food we prepare. Of all the large, chunky handled kitchen tools available, I prefer the OXO Good Grips line. They have large diameter handles of soft rubber with fins at the thumb and index finger part of many of the grips. I have found other, less expensive hard plastic or metal tools painful to use. The best prices I have found on the OXO Good Grips is at Corning Ware Factory Outlet stores and occasionally in the clearance sale bins at kitchen specialty stores, Wal Mart, etc. I spread the cost of buying these tools over several years and also asked for specific tools as Christmas or birthday gifts.

A good quality, sharp knife saves a lot of energy in chopping and slicing and is safer to use. Look for pots and pans with an easy to grip handle that are not too heavy to lift when full of food. Consider a large handled fork and spoon. They decrease frustration and spills if your fingers have difficulty holding on to a thin utensil. Use a steak knife instead of a table knife to cut meat and dense vegetables on your plate with half the effort. Instead of a regular flat dinner plate, I use a soup plate with a low rim or lip around the edge making it much

easier to load a fork or spoon without spilling. If muscle contraction, cramping and pain in your hands is a problem, try using warm to hot water only when washing and rinsing dishes, to relax muscles, tendons and fascia. A blast of cold water can make muscles contract and hurt more. Finally, put a soft, padded area rug or mat in front of the sink and stove. This lessens fatigue in leg and hip muscles and joints.

Try some of these ideas and enjoy having a bit easier time with meal preparation.



Some of my favorite kitchen helpers.