



# RECOVERY BY DOING GROCERY SHOPPING GUIDELINES

BY: SARAH NICHOLS, RD, LD, CEDS

**In this two-part blog series, we will discuss the processes and objectives of the grocery shopping outing.**

Grocery shopping and meal planning play a vital role in self-care and the **Recovery by Doing** approach. At Esperanza, our nutrition team assists adults and adolescents (as part of their treatment plan) throughout the grocery shopping process. It's beneficial to view this in terms of behaviors (such as restricting, binging, purging, etc.) if you don't identify with any specific diagnosis listed. Any form of strained relationship with food deserves attention and care. Here's how grocery shopping goals can differ for various diagnoses:

## **Binge Eating Disorder**

***When you have binge eating disorder, we focus on sufficiency first.***

- It is important to identify all eating disorders as having a restrictive component to them. We don't want to promote a scarcity mindset with food, so having enough food (truly enough food, not a diet culture version of enough food) that is satisfying is the first step.
- We are mindful in the early stages of recovery when active binging is still present to not expose you to your trigger foods in the home environment without any other kind of support or structure.
- This might mean that we buy sufficient food for home, and then keep challenge foods at the center to help ease into food exposures using Exposure and Response prevention (ERP) which is an evidence-based modality used to help treat binge eating behaviors.
- We support the use of self-compassion and make decisions aligned with values and recovery. Sometimes the shame can be so debilitating, it is an exposure to be in the grocery store.
- We are sure to grocery shop when you are nourished and able to use skills. This helps to prevent any impulse purchases not aligned with your recovery. As with all disorders, it is important to remember that all foods fit – and we are encouraging you to buy non-diet items.

## **Bulimia Nervosa**

**When you have bulimia, it is important to ensure nutritional sufficiency first.**

- Helping to promote stable, consistent patterns of eating helps to prevent restrict-binge-purge patterns of eating from continuing. It also helps with blood sugar regulation which is important for mood and behavior regulation.
- **We grocery shop with you and encourage you to challenge your food rules with items purchased. Often, when purging stops it can be common for an increase in restriction or “healthy” behaviors that are not healthy at all. This means shopping must be intentional about not buying purposefully low-calorie food items.**
- The aim of grocery shopping can be to help you trust yourself again to eat all kinds of foods without using purging behaviors around them.
- When ready, we work to challenge you to purchase previously forbidden foods. This can often be accompanied by intense shame, so we work with you to use self-compassion and challenge cognitive distortions around the food.
- We are intentional to make sure that the eating disorder does not use the grocery shopping opportunity to self-sabotage or restrict which fuels the vicious cycle.

**When pursuing the journey of recovery, it's not only about consuming a meal or snack; it involves planning, budgeting, shopping, storing, preparing, and reframing any disordered thoughts or behaviors that may arise during the process.**

