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## STORE BRANDS STRETCH YOUR FOOD DOLLARS

A trip to the supermarket this week, nudged me to write an article on how store brands can cut your food budget. With cooler temperatures just around the corner I went to stock up on oatmeal and found the popular Quaker brand was \$1 more than the store brand. This was a 25% mark-up for a product that is exactly the same, containing just one simple ingredient - whole grain oats. I would rather keep my dollar, so opted for the store brand.

Advertising tries to convince us that name brand equals superior taste and quality, but the research doesn't support the pitch. Store brands, which account for 25% off of all grocery store sales by unit, are just as tasty or better. Choosing store brands can bring significant savings.

The October 2013, issue of *Consumer Reports* did their own tests of thirteen popular foods – cashews, cranberry juice, frozen shrimp, ice cream, ketchup, maple syrup, mayonnaise, mixed vegetables, shredded mozzarella, and trail mix. In every case they found a store brand that was just as good. In four cases the store brand was even better. Cost comparisons were all over the board with brand name products costing up to 64% more. In April of 2019, *Consumer Reports* published an article on supermarkets with the best store brands. Three came out on top – Trader Joes, Costco, and Central Market (located in Texas).

Taste is the number one criteria shoppers use to select food, followed by price. Preferences vary tremendously, so you have to take a risk and try some unfamiliar store brands to see if there really is a difference. Accept ahead of time, some products will just not satisfy you.

Buy only small quantities to try store brands out first. For instance, I once bought multiple boxes of a granola bar assuming my ever ravenous sons would gladly devour it. Wrong, they hated it and I was stuck with dozens of the product.

Ideally all stores would have a simple listing of store brands to pick up when you walk in the store. Based on my own research looking at store websites and visiting retailers, there is no such list. Shoppers need it, so ask them to provide one. If enough people speak up, they may respond.

Enjoy two of my favorite recipes using those store brand oats.

## ***OATMEAL MUFFINS***

1 egg  
1 cup buttermilk  
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed  
1/3 cup canola oil  
1 cup quick cooking oats  
1 cup white whole wheat flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda

Heat oven to 400°F. Grease bottom of muffin cups. Beat egg, stir in buttermilk, brown sugar and oil. Mix remaining ingredients until flour is moistened – batter should be lumpy. Fill cups 2/3 full. Bake 20-25 minutes or until light brown.

## ***APPLE CINNAMON GRANOLA BARS***

1 cup flour  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
1 cup oats (uncooked)  
1/2 cup vegetable shortening, margarine or butter  
4 apples (or 16 ounces applesauce)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Put flour, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, brown sugar and oats in a mixing bowl. Stir together. Add shortening to the bowl. Use 2 table knives to mix the ingredients and cut them into crumbs.

Lightly grease the bottom and sides of an 8x8-inch baking dish with a little bit of shortening. Spread half the crumb mixture in the greased baking dish.

Remove the core from the apples and slice them. Put apple slices into the baking dish (or if using applesauce, spread it over the crumb mixture.) Top the apples (or applesauce) with the rest of the crumb mixture.

Bake in oven for 40-45 minutes. Let cool and cut into 24 equal squares. Wrap individual bars in plastic wrap.

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