

Food Store Assessment Survey Tool Manual

The Albany Prevention Research Center

Diabetes Core Project Group

New York State Department of Health

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Store Information

This section should be filled out before you enter the store. To begin, first fill in the store's identifying information.

- Date and time of survey
- Survey takers
- Name of the store
- Database ID
- Address of the store
- GPS reading at the front door (this can also be done after you exit the store). See Appendix D for instructions.

General Observations

Next, you will make some general observations about the outside physical environment of the store. This section should also be completed before you enter the store.

- Parking: circle one
 - Off street: there is a designated parking area located well off of the street. A grocery store parking lot would be an example.
 - Street: there is limited parking located between the store and the street. An example would be a small gravel area in front of the store and out of traffic.
 - No designated parking: the store does not have any parking area. An example would be a store on a city block.
- Handicap accessibility: three yes or no questions
 - Are there handicap parking spots?
 - Look at the entrance of the store to see if can be accessed by handicap people. Is there a ramp and curb cuts so that the ramp can be reached?
 - A store with an entrance level to the ground would be considered handicap accessible.
 - See if the door to enter the store is automatic or has to be opened manually. Some stores, such as farm stands, do not have doors and are

open to the outside. In this case, you would circle yes and comment that the store was open or outdoors.

- Type of store: circle one. If it is a specialty store, fill in the store type (i.e., fruit and vegetable stand).
 - Supermarket: a large, corporate-owned chain store that retails a general line of food, such as canned and frozen foods; fresh fruits and vegetables; and fresh and prepared meats, fish, and poultry. Examples would be Price Chopper and Grand Union.
 - Grocery store: a smaller non-corporate-owned store that retails a general line of food, such as canned and frozen foods; fresh fruits and vegetables; and fresh and prepared meats, fish, and poultry. An example would be a mom-and-pop type store that sells the foods listed above.
 - Convenience store: retails a limited line of goods that includes milk, bread, soda, and snacks. Also known as food marts. Examples would be Stewart's and Cumberland Farms that do not have gas pumps.
 - Convenience store with gas station: retails automotive fuels in combination with a convenience store. Examples would be Mobil Mart or Stewart's with gas pumps.
 - Specialty store: retails specialized lines of food. Includes fruit/vegetable markets, meat markets, drug stores etc. Examples would be a roadside fruit and vegetable stand or CVS.

Entering the store

Now you are ready to go inside the store. When you enter, ask to speak to the store manager. Identify yourselves to the manager and provide him/her with a copy of the letter explaining the project (Appendix A). Be prepared to answer any questions the manager may have (examples in Appendix B). Don't use big scientific words like assessment; it is better to keep your introduction simple and say "we are going to walk around the store". If the manager is hesitant, emphasize that you are going to all of the food stores in the area and will not single out their store, or publish any

information about their specific store. If the manager agrees to let you proceed, continue collecting data inside the store.

- Number of cash registers in the store
 - Whether they are currently being used or not.
 - Do not count lotto terminals or terminals at the customer service desk.
- See if the store sells:
 - Cigarettes: yes or no
 - Alcohol: yes or no
 - Fresh seafood: yes or no
 - Look for a fish market area or fresh packaged/prepared seafood
 - Frozen seafood: yes or no
 - This question refers to frozen seafood sold in the frozen foods section only
 - Use the comment line to write down what kind of frozen fish you found, for example whole shrimp, a variety of frozen fish products, fish sticks, a Lean Cuisine dinner with fish, etc.

Specific Food Items

Now you will begin looking for specific food items in the store.

General instructions for food items

- Availability: yes or no
 - Answer yes if they sell the item, whether or not it is in stock when you visit
- Display
 - 1=prominent. This means the item was “in your face” and took up a lot of shelf space. An end of aisle display would be an example.
 - 2=moderate. This means the item was reasonably easy to find and could be easily reached. Most items will fall into this category. An item on the shelf at about eye level would be an example.

- 3=obscure. This means you had to really look around for the item, or even had to ask a store employee where it was. An item on the very bottom shelf would be an example.
- Lowest unit price: refers to unit listed on questionnaire not store's unit price. Do not write down sale prices, look for the regular price of the item.
- Comments: use this column for further description of the food items.

Specific directions for individual food items

- **Milk:** see if the store sells refrigerated milk and circle yes or no. Flavored/sweetened milk, soy milk, and rice milk do not count. Lactose free milk can be included. Goat milk can also be included. Half and half and cream do not count, but if they are all a store sells, circle no and note this on the comment line.
 - Low fat milk
 - Look for milk that is 1% or skim.
 - Also check to see if the store sells high fat milk. Whole and 2% milk are high fat.
 - A conversion table for units to ounces is located in Appendix C.
 - Sometimes the small (1 pint) containers of milk are shelved in a different section of the store than the larger containers of milk. They can sometimes be found with the individual size plastic bottles of other beverages, like soda and juice.
- **Fresh eggs**
 - Look for the lowest priced dozen of eggs; the size and color do not matter. Write size in the comments section.
- **Fresh produce:** see if the store sells any kind of fresh produce and circle yes or no. Write in the comments section what produce was available, other than cucumbers, tomatoes, apples, and oranges. If many items were available, comment that the store had a variety of produce. For lowest price, note on the survey form whether the price is per item or per pound. If price is per pound, you can calculate cost per item later. Use standard weights from the USDA for a medium cucumber, tomato, apple, and orange. For

example, if an average medium tomato weighs .27 pounds and tomatoes at a particular store cost 1.99 a pound, $.27 \times 1.99 = .54$ or 54 cents per tomato.

- Cucumber
 - .66 lb or 10.62 oz
- Tomato
 - .27 lb or 4.34 oz
- Apple
 - .30 lb or 4.87 oz
 - Record the price of the cheapest apple and write down the type of apple (Granny Smith, etc) in the comments section.
- Orange
 - .29 lb or 4.62 oz
 - Fruits very similar to oranges, such as tangerines are okay.
- **Roasted or smoked turkey lunch meat (at the deli)**
 - Look for the displayed item with the lowest price
- **Roasted or smoked turkey lunch meat (pre-packaged)**
 - Look for the least expensive package and record the ounces in the unit column
 - Many larger stores have pre-packaged lunch meat next to the deli, but it is usually expensive. The lowest priced lunch meat is usually found near other pre-packaged meats like hot dogs and bacon.
- **Bread:** see if the store sells any kind of bread and circle yes or no
 - High fiber loaf of bread
 - Fiber should be 2g or more per slice. Look for breads that are darker in color and say whole wheat, multi-grain, oat, etc. Specialty breads without nutrition labeling can be included if they are obviously high fiber, for example a dark colored loaf of sunflower cracked wheat bread.
 - Find the least expensive loaf and record the ounces in the unit column. A conversion table is located in Appendix C.

- Check to see if a low fiber loaf of bread (less than 2g per slice) is available.
- **Can of tuna in water**
 - Look for the cheapest can and write down the ounces in the unit column.
 - Also check to see if the store sells tuna packed in oil.
- **Aspirin (81mg to 325mg)**
 - Find the least expensive bottle and record the count in the unit column and the mg in the comments column.
 - Make sure and check the packages of children's aspirin as well. They can be included as long as they have a dosage of at least 81mg. If the least expensive aspirin you found was children's aspirin, make note of this on the comments line.
 - If you found a travel pack, either in addition to a larger bottle or exclusively, make note of the price and quantity on the comments line.

Miscellaneous instructions

- Some survey preparation tips for dealing with store managers from the USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit
 - “Relieve any anxieties that the managers/owners may have about their participation by providing the following assurances: (1) the store name, policies, and prices will not be published or publicized; (2) the interviewers will not disrupt the normal flow of business by speaking with customers or employees; and (3) staff involvement in the survey process will be kept to a minimum.”
 - “Inform store managers/owners that findings from individual stores will be completely confidential. Assure them that the information gathered from individual stores will be combined with that from many other stores and that the final results will be reported in statistical form only (i.e., percentages and totals). NOTE: Every member of the research team must adhere to the rules of confidentiality. This means that team members must never divulge names or factual information about any store survey.”

- If a manager refuses to let you conduct the survey, it is important that you still fill out a survey form for that store with the store's identifying information, such as name, address, and type of store. Write "refused" in the comments section.

- Keep your personal safety in mind
 - If possible, do the survey in pairs or teams.
 - Do not carry personal items like purses into the store
 - Bring only what you need to do the survey- a blank form, clipboard, pen/pencil, etc.
 - Keep completed survey forms in a safe place. It is probably not a good idea to carry forms from previous stores into a new store. You might encounter a hostile store manager who will try to confiscate your forms and you would lose your data!

- Stores start to get busy around lunch time and managers are likely to be busy helping customers. This might be a good time to take your own lunch break.

- Keep a data collection log. The date & time of the store visit, mileage at arrival, store name, store location, survey takers' names, and whether or not the survey was completed should be included in the log. If the survey was not completed because the store was closed, note in the log when the store will be open for you to come back (if this information is available).

- Come up with a procedure for what to do if a store is closed when you visit.
 - Check business hours and return when store will be open
 - Check for signs that the store has gone out of business. If this is the case, make a note in the data collection log.

- If you find a new food store while you are out in the field, survey the store. Make note on the survey form and in the data collection log that this store is a new addition.

Appendix A
Letter for Store Managers

Letterhead

Dear Sir or Madam:

We are visiting your store to collect information for a research project we are working on for the Centers for Disease Control's Prevention Research Center at the University at Albany. This summer, we are going to all of the food stores in the area. We want to find out if people with diabetes can get diabetes friendly foods. There are 11 specific foods we will be looking for. Our survey will probably take about ten minutes. We will not be talking to your customers or interfering with the operation of your store.

The name, policies, and prices of your store will NOT be published or publicized. Information that we collect at your store will be kept confidential. We are interested in totals for all food stores in the community, not any one store specifically.

If you have any questions about our study, you can contact the University at Albany, School of Public Health at the above number.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B
Possible Questions/Comments

1. Question: Who are you?
Answer: We are working on a diabetes research project for the Centers for Disease Control's Prevention Research Center at the University at Albany, School of Public Health.
2. Question: Why are you here?
Answer: We are visiting all of the food stores in the area. We want to find out if people with diabetes who live around here can get diabetes friendly foods.
3. Question: What are you going to do?
Answer: We are going to walk around the store and look for these items (show list). We won't be talking to your customers.
4. Question: How long is this going to take?
Answer: (Large store) About 20 minutes. (Small store) About 10 minutes.
5. Question: What is that? (Referring to GPS unit)
Answer: It's a GPS unit. It gives us directions and we want to make sure we are in the right place.
6. Question: How do I know this is legitimate?
Answer: You can call the School of Public Health at the University at Albany and they will verify that we are working for them (can also show SUNY ID).
7. Question: I don't feel like answering any questions/ I'm too busy.
Answer: You don't have to answer any questions. We just need to walk around the store and write some things down on our form. We will not be here very long.

Appendix C
Conversion Table

1 pint=16 ounces

1 quart=32 ounces

$\frac{1}{2}$ gallon=64 ounces

1 gallon=128 ounces

1 pound=16 ounces

1 pound 8 ounces=24 ounces

Appendix D

GPS Unit Instructions

Note: Instructions are for the Meridian Color GPS Unit

1. Turn the unit on:

- Press **PWR**: The unit turns on and displays the start-up screen.
- Press **ENTER** until the map screen is displayed.

2. Getting a fix:

Once you see the map screen, wait until the busy sign (an hourglass) disappears and a black arrow appears. Now the receiver is communicating with the satellites, and has located itself. You can zoom in to different levels using the **in** and **out** keys.

To save a waypoint, press **GOTO** and hold till you see the waypoint screen (the latitude and longitude readings are also given on this screen). Then, using the arrow keys, highlight **NAME** and press **ENTER**. This takes you to a keypad screen where you can type in the unique ID using the arrow keys and **ENTER** key. When you are finished, scroll down to **OK** and press **ENTER**. Next, highlight **SAVE**, and hit **ENTER** until you see the map screen with the waypoint labeled with the unique ID. This indicates a saved waypoint.

3. To change a waypoint:

Select the waypoint you want to change, by moving the arrow to the point on the map screen. Hit **ENTER**, and on the next screen, select the ID number and hit **ENTER**. This will take you to the keypad screen, where you can make changes.

Misc. Instructions for handling the GPS unit:

- Hold the unit with the antenna facing toward the sky.
- If you move the arrow (cursor) around on the map screen, make sure you hit **ESC** before you save a waypoint, otherwise the point will be saved where the cursor was moved.

- The backlight can be turned off to save battery life. Hold the **PWR** key down until the backlight first dims and then turns off.
- Always turn unit off before replacing batteries.