

7 Strategies to Avoid Getting Ripped Off at Checkout

By Kati Neville

I'm paying more attention at the checkout lately. I've had sale products ring up inaccurately, wrong produce codes applied, incorrect change made, and coupons completely missed.

Here are some tips to help you avoid getting ripped off:

1) **Have any coupons ready.** Do NOT fish around in your purse for loose coupons while the clerk is checking your groceries because you might overlook a register error. Have all coupons together and handy before unloading your cart.

2) **Let the clerk know you have coupons or a store club card.** He'll say, "Did you find everything okay?" To which you respond, "Yes, I have some coupons for you." Present your coupons as soon as you have his full attention. He may take them from you right then, or ask you to wait. Either way, don't act shy about it or embarrassed. He is in the business of taking your money and you are in the business of saving yourself money. It's that simple.

3) **Group multiples of the same item together.** Say you've decided that the "3 for \$5.00," or "10 for \$10" are good specials. Be sure to group those products together so that the clerk can scan them one after another. It's easier to spot mistakes.

4) **Place those screaming deals on the belt LAST.** Often the checker starts scanning items before you're done emptying the basket. By unload specials *last*, you can watch for accuracy.

5) **Ditto for items to be weighed.** Clerks must enter produce or bulk bin codes by hand. These codes are easy to confuse. If weighed items are among the last to be scanned, you can spot mistakes. (I forgot this step recently and got charged \$3.00 more for an entirely different product. Because I noticed after paying, the checker couldn't fix it. So I got to spend another 15 minutes at the customer service desk. Oh happy day!)

6) **Shop without kids.** After comparing shopping receipts from trips with kids and without, I found that I spend about \$35.00 MORE when they're along. Included in this expense are the little treats I offer to reward good behavior. These treats get doled out when we're in the checkout line, which distracts me from the transaction. Sounds familiar? Consider shopping alone.

7) **Scan your receipt for mistakes before you leave.** Despite your best efforts, distractions happen. Magazine covers catch your eye, you run into a friend, or zone out after a long day of work. No biggie. Take a few seconds to review your receipt to ensure things are in order. Look for doubles; sometimes items get scanned twice. Then look at product names that sound unfamiliar. Get discrepancies taken care of before you leave the store.

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