

Smart eats, healthy streets

Deserting a food desert can be tough, but experts have tips

ANCHOR LEDE

Food deserts – neighborhoods that don't have quick access to a grocery store with healthy options – are, sadly, nothing new. They lead to quick stops at the fast-food place or gas station, where healthy food may be at a premium.

But have you ever taken a deep dive into how food deserts can significantly impact a person's health? And more importantly, what can be done about the problem?

TAKE VO

Clare Spires, an exercise physiologist at OSF HealthCare, has some things to keep in mind.

- Planning meals for the week is key, Spires says. Estimate how much food you'll need and how much you have to spend.
- When you can get to the grocery store, make wise choices. Spires suggests canned fruits and vegetables that have a long shelf life.
- Consider creating a garden at home or advocating for a community garden in your neighborhood.
- If you can't help but go to the eatery or gas station often, choose healthier options.

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Clare Spires

OSF HealthCare exercise physiologist

"I've found gas stations are very similar to grocery stores. As long as you stay on the outside perimeter, you'll stay away from candy and chips that will be down an aisle. When you walk in, there's usually some sort of fresh fruit or vegetable right there. Pretzels are really great filling snacks. Nuts are good for you. You have granola bars too." (:35)

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You can also talk to your local government or social service groups about food insecurity.

Spires warns that a diet heavy on fast food and gas station food can lead to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.