

[IMAGE]

Healthy Fridge

By Carrie Wiatt, MS

Summer is finally here and it's time to clean up your kitchen - and your health! Here are some easy tips and tricks for cleaning out the fridge, freezer and pantry to ensure the foundation for healthy eating is established.

Let's start with the fridge

In order to prevent food-borne illnesses, check the temperature of your refrigerator. It should be set at 40 degrees or less. Your freezer should read 0 degrees or less. Temperatures above these levels can increase the risks of illnesses. And always check dates and labels, especially on dairy products. As the saying goes "when in doubt, throw it out!"

Have you been trying to get more calcium and protein into your diet by eating yogurt? Throw away fruit-on-the-bottom yogurt in your fridge and stock up on low-fat, low-sugar varieties. Nonfat, plain or Greek yogurt sweetened with 1 teaspoon of agave or honey is a healthier option.

As you are browsing through your fridge, make sure to get rid of high-calorie sauces like barbeque, along with mayonnaise, cheesy sauces, dips and the like. Replace them with low-calorie, light and low-sodium versions. You can also incorporate "free" condiments such as chili sauce, horseradish, vinegars, fresh salsa, and seasoning blends into your meals.

healthy fridge - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Make sure to stock the refrigerator with low-calorie beverages as well. Swap your once-a-day soda habit with an occasional better-for-you ginger ale or all-natural soda. Sip on healthier beverages like flavored teas. Add excitement to water with cucumber, mint, or a slice of lemon, orange, or even cherries when in season.

Move on to the freezer

Dig into the freezer and trash sodium-laden, high-calorie frozen meals, as well as any full-fat frozen treats you've hoarded lately to satisfy the late-night sweet tooth. Substitute with whole-fruit sorbets, low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt. Even better, make your own frozen treats by freezing a few handfuls of grapes or a

banana with an ounce of melted dark chocolate.

If you have frozen leftovers, prevent freezer burn by tightly wrapping food and the containers in plastic wrap, removing as much extra air as possible.

Don't Forget the Pantry

While assessing the pantry, check to see if you are still hanging on to salty snacks, chips and cookies. If you are, ditch anything full of dyes, hydrogenated oils, added sugars, and preservatives. Substitute these with healthy snacks such as black bean chips, granola bars (whole-grain, low-sugar varieties), brown rice crackers, plain popcorn, or raw nuts, such as almonds and pistachios.

Go even further and choose snacks that come from the refrigerator to satisfy cravings. Fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products are great options for between-meal snacks.

As always, remember to keep an eye on your portion size. Don't eat directly from any bag or before you know it, you'll quickly overindulge!

Here are some additional tips to ensure a healthy pantry this summer:

- Stock up on fiber-rich and whole-grain products, such as rolled oats, quinoa, brown rice, whole-grain pasta and barley. Other great items to keep on hand are low-sodium canned beans, and spices to pack your meals with flavor. Keep a few low-sodium soups like butternut squash or tomato for a quick low-calorie lunch or appetizer prior to dinner.
- When it comes to condiments, the best choices for salad dressings include balsamic vinaigrettes and low-fat natural varieties of ranch dressing. If you are interested in making healthy choices when it comes to condiments, try different mustards. This low-calorie condiment comes in many varieties, such as sweet, spicy, whole-grain, Dijon, yellow and brown.
- You can also use low-sugar or no-added- sugar fruit spreads. Spread two tablespoons of apple butter or pure fruit jams on your whole-wheat toast or muffin.
- Enjoy low-calorie salsas. Try exciting flavors like mango, pineapple, chipotle, fire roasted or salsa verde. Add fresh spices and herbs such as rosemary, thyme, basil, mint and parsley.
- Switch out soy sauce for liquid aminos. It spices up your stir-fry, soups, sushi and even eggs. Be sure to be portion-savvy and use only 2 teaspoons.

- Instead of your unhealthy chip dips, try hummus, which comes in a variety of flavors. You don't even need a chip to dip: try a cucumber stick or grape tomato instead!
- If you're a fan of deli sandwiches, choose organic, nitrate-free deli meat. Make sure the products you choose also contain no fillers, artificial ingredients or sweeteners. The best choice? Go to your deli and order some freshly sliced turkey, which will have the lowest sodium levels and most likely taste better, too! Just make sure to ask for the all-natural, hormone- and nitrate-free variety.
- Trade in your brats or greasy sausages for healthier chicken varieties. Varieties include chicken & apple, artichoke & garlic, portabella mushroom, and many others. Although they are lower calorie choices, you still need to watch the sodium!
- Choose low-fat dairy products. Switch to skim milk, low-fat sour cream, 1/3-less-fat cream cheese and lower fat cheeses. If you're staying away from dairy for any health or personal reasons, opt for almond milk, tofu cream cheese, soy cheese, and veganaise (instead of mayo).
- Switch out your butter or margarine to healthy natural spreads that taste great, but with no saturated or trans fats!
- Replace iceberg lettuce with better-for-you-options including green and red-leaf lettuces, romaine lettuce or baby spinach. Other healthy greens packed with vitamins including A and K include kale, red Swiss chard and arugula.
- Get rid of your regular peanut butter, which is usually filled with sugar or palm oil. Replace it with all-natural, mix-it-yourself choices that contain only peanuts or almond butter. Keep these in the fridge once opened! You can also visit your local health food store and grind your own peanut and almond butter from peanuts or almonds, nothing else!

After the cleaning

Once you've cleaned out your refrigerator, freezer and pantry, keep in mind that anything that's not out-of-date and safe to eat can and should be donated to a local food bank, shelter, church, etc. You can either drop everything off at the location or call for free pick-up.

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