

Spring Cleaning Your Kitchen - for Your Health!

by Sarah Muntel, RD



The days are longer, the weather is warmer and spring is in the air! Gone are the short, cold days of heavy meals, steamy hot chocolate and cuddling up under a blanket. Many people are motivated and recharged during this time of year, and they use spring as a time to clean up their diet and begin making healthier changes to their lifestyle.

For your spring diet overhaul, it's important to set yourself up for success. Having the right foods and drinks in your kitchen cabinets can make things so much easier! Throughout the winter, the wrong foods can easily creep in. Chips, cookies and cakes can make their way into your cabinet, and when the wrong foods are in your kitchen, you will be tempted to reach for unwanted food. It's time for the spring swap to get the right foods back into your kitchen!

Placement is Everything

When you place your foods in the correct place, you know where they are. This makes healthy eating so much easier! Everything has a place, so make sure your food items are in the right spot and easy to find. If you carelessly throw veggies in the back of the fridge, no one will see them and they can easily be missed. Finding spoiled produce in your fridge is such a bummer...so keep them in the crisper or wherever else you're sure to see them!

When organizing your shelf, make it easy to find the "good foods". For example, put the healthiest foods and best choices at eye level so they will be easier to grab. You will be much more likely to pick the healthy choice if you are staring right at it! Another idea is to place good foods on the counter. A bowl of fruit on the kitchen table will encourage you to eat healthier foods every time you walk by.

Think Outside the Cupboard

Think beyond organizing your cupboards. There are other spring ideas to get your diet recharged! Think about planting a garden, for example. There is no better way to get fresh vegetables than by planting them yourself. If you aren't up for a full garden, plant a couple different pots of vegetables. What's better than a pot of homegrown tomatoes on your patio? This will save money for your pocketbook as well as room in your fridge!

Out with the Old and in with the New

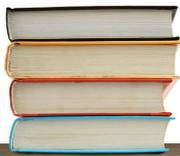
Drinks: Many don't know this, but fluids can add many extra calories and a lot of sugar to your diet if they're not chosen correctly. For example, a 12-oz soda contains almost 40 grams of sugar which almost equates to 10 teaspoons. That's a lot of sugar! Alcohol, hot chocolate and sweet teas can provide your body with too much sugar throughout the day as well. This spring, swap to sugar-free options. Water is always best, but for some, it can get boring. Try adding a slice of lemon or lime to your water for added flavor. Sugar-free flavored beverages, decaffeinated teas and decaffeinated coffee are also great options.



Snack Drawer: This is easy. Chips, cookies and cakes all need to go. High-fat and high-sugar items need to be replaced with better options. You'll feel better and have more energy with the appropriate snack choices! It's pretty easy to empty this drawer, because for most, all of it goes. Now, what do you fill it with? Snacks are an important part of anyone's diet. Fill this drawer with whole grain crackers (you can add some nut butter or cheese), popcorn, nuts and protein bars.



Cookbook Shelf: Time to dust off the cookbooks this spring! Get out of the winter rut of recycling the same five meals every week. Try new recipes this spring to spice things up in the kitchen! Make a pact to try one new recipe each week. Fresh salads, grilled meats and vegetable dishes can add a lot of variety to your dull winter meal plan.



Spice Rack: How long have you had your spices? In general, whole spices last about four years and ground spices last about three. Dried herbs last for about one to two years. Many of us have spices that are more than 10 years old! Toss the old and fill up with new. Spices can be a great way to add flavor to your foods. Add garlic, onion, sage, rosemary and marjoram to your meat. Flavor your fruit with cinnamon and nutmeg and your vegetables with parsley, lemon or dill. Adding a little spice will enhance the flavor and increase the likelihood that you will go for healthier options!



Pantry: White bread, white rice and boxed macaroni and cheese... all of these need to go! This can leave your pantry pretty bare, so for the pantry, think whole grains. Stock up on whole grain pasta and bread. Swap brown rice or quinoa for white rice. Dump the sugary breakfast cereal for whole grain bran flakes and oatmeal. Looking for additional pantry staples? Canned or dried beans can make a great side dish for any meal, and natural peanut butter can add a lot of protein and healthy, good fat. These are pantry must haves!



Container Shelf: Stock up on plastic containers for storage in all sizes. Saving a portion of last night's dinner can be used for a quick lunch instead of fast food or a meal out. Feeling extra ambitious? Make an extra casserole for a busy evening. Storing cut-up veggies and fruit can make your morning easier as well. Plan on picking up a few new containers to make sure you have a variety of sizes for easy storage.

Fridge: Out with the full-fat dairy, high-calorie dips and desserts. Reach way back and grab the moldy strawberries, wilted lettuce and old fruit as well. It's time to start over! Fill your fridge up with the essentials. Low-fat milk, low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat cheese and Greek yogurt are all great dairy options and can provide you with a great protein source. Looking for more protein options? Hardboiled eggs and low-fat lunch meat can add some protein to any meal. Next, visit the produce section and fill your crisper with fresh fruits and veggies. Feeling lazy? Go ahead and buy the pre-chopped choices to make things easier on yourself. Pre-cut veggies and fruit make a quick go-to snack on a busy day.

Freezer: Empty out freezer-burned items, frozen pastries and ice cream. Now you have some extra room and there are several things to fill it back up with. Frozen chicken, beef and pork are all great options, and throwing meat in your freezer can make it easy to put a quick meal together on a busy night. Although fresh fruits and vegetables are always the best, frozen options are also great for quick meals! Frozen veggies make a great side dish, and you can pair it with frozen chicken for a quick stir fry. Similarly, frozen fruit can quickly be added to a smoothie for some extra nutrients.



At the End of the Day. . .

Sweep the cobwebs away and let's go. Start with one cupboard at a time and begin to add the healthy food your body needs. Make this spring all about YOU as you move toward a healthy kitchen and a healthy lifestyle!

About the Author:

Sarah Muntel, RD, is a Registered Dietitian and Bariatric Coordinator at Community Bariatric Surgeons in Indianapolis, IN. She has worked with bariatric surgery patients for 17 years and especially enjoys leading support groups. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and three children.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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