

*the* **FRESH 20**

# KITCHEN ORGANIZATION



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## 01 ORGANIZE YOUR FOOD BY CATEGORY

Whether you have a walk-in pantry or a small cabinet space in your apartment, an organized pantry is a great weight loss strategy. Label the areas or just keep a visual separation.

Start with a full pantry clean out by emptying all of the shelves. Divide food into 3 categories:

**TOSS:** if its expired, or lacks nutritional value, toss it

**KEEP (OPENED):** make sure the seal is still effective, combine if you have 2 open packages, and consider what you might move into a clear storage container for ease of use/refilling/identification (perhaps lentils/dried beans/grains)

**KEEP (UNOPENED):** store unopened containers behind opened containers with the foods with the earliest expiration date toward the front. When you purchase a new food, set it behind the one already in your pantry to follow the “first in, first out” rule and prevent food waste. This also give you a chance to take a regular inventory and stay in control of the foods in your kitchen.

## 02 CONTAIN YOUR CONTAINERS

Empty your container storage and determine which are worth keeping. Those that are bent, cracked or do not have a tight-fitting lid may be worth recycling. If you need to invest in a few additional containers, think of the best sizes/shapes and material for your purposes.

Invest in container lid separators to keep lids from disappearing and keep only what you need and use.

## 03 HOMEMADE SNACK PACK BASKET

The snack basket is a simple but oh-so-effective kitchen hack. Buy healthy snacks in bulk (the most cost-effective strategy) and separate into individual servings for a quick grab-n-go for work or a snack for the kids that will give them the fuel they need. Contain snacks to one basket so everyone in your house knows where to turn to satisfy hunger. For refrigerated foods, keep a portion of the fridge –either a shelf or drawer, devoted to healthy snacks.

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## A FEW IDEAS FOR YOUR PANTRY SNACK BASKET:

Unsalted nuts and unsweetened dried fruit

Individual package of almond butter and a smart cracker alternative such as Mary's Gone Crackers

Homemade granola bars (if using store-bought, select one with no added sugar and 5 ingredients or less such as a Larabar)

## AND FOR YOUR REFRIGERATOR SNACK SHELF:

Washed or frozen berries and plain (unsweetened) yogurt

Cut veggies and bean dip

Any fruit

Hardboiled eggs

Portion of leftover grain salad

Homemade green juice

Leftover cut chicken with a homemade dipping sauce

## 04 MAKE YOUR MEAL-PLAN VISIBLE

Keep your meal plan in the kitchen for all to see. This eliminates the question of “what’s for dinner” and also minimizes complaints about dinner since it’s clearly printed. It is also a helpful reminder of what you need to do (defrost frozen fish or add ingredients to crock pot as examples) to limit the chance of forgetting when life gets busy. Keep printed recipes easily accessible for the week to reduce time spent searching (this alone can literally shave 5 minutes off of dinner prep).

When you are deciding where you will keep your plan, this is also a good opportunity to go through the recipe cards, cookbooks you may have stored and determine which you still use, which may be stored away from the kitchen and how you want to store recipes in the future.

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## 05 FRIDGE PURGE

No one's fridge looks this clean all the time. I'm not sure mine has ever looked this clean. I cook and my fridge is messy but I do like to clean out the fridge every 6 months.

When I can't stand it anymore, everything in the fridge gets thrown away! Everything! Old ketchup, specialty mustard that no longer has a purpose, soy sauce, ancient taco sauce and my personal favorite, last summer's pickles. Fridge purge is a healthy process. It sheds away the heavy, unwanted burden of fridge clutter and gives any kitchen a facelift. Also, you can help fight bacteria and cross contamination of meats and vegetables by cleaning out the fridge every once and a while! Once it's empty, I wipe it down inside and strategize where each type of item will go back in based on how often it's used. I also arrange items shortest in front to tallest in back.

## 06 PANTRY CLEAN OUT

There are several items sitting in your pantry right now that you will never use. There are others that I plead you not to use. Top Ramen packets come to mind. Without looking, make a mental list of all of the ingredients you have used in the last couple of months.

Now look through the pantry/cupboard and remove anything that didn't appear in the mental list. If you have an exotic spice rub from a gift basket two years ago, trust me, you are not going to get around to it. Same goes for that weird barbecue sauce that has no origin.

Clear the shelves for vibrant, quality ingredients that you use often. I typically keep 20 pantry staples that I can use as building blocks for meals. Along with a few healthy snacks for my teens, this is how I keep a minimalist pantry.

Get rid of 2 year old spices and dried herbs. They may look fine, but the flavor is gone. Flavored oils have a shorter shelf life than raw oils. Check for expiration and get rid of anything that has been opened longer than six months. Donate the rest (unopened and unexpired) to a food bank.

snacks.

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## 07 UTENSIL DRAWER EDIT

Keeping a tidy utensil drawer is no easy task. To start, choose a few key areas closest to your stove, like the nearest drawer and a spot on the counter for a utensil holder. Use the countertop holder as a catch-all for a set of tongs and a few of your most used spatulas and wooden spoons so they're within easy reach for daily cooking. In the drawer, tuck away other large cooking utensils like a pasta claw, soup ladle, larger tongs, and additional spoons.

If you have extra space, choose a drawer under your largest area of counter space for prep items like measuring spoons and cups, garlic press, cherry pitter, avocado slicer, etc. Also, I'm a big advocate for magnetic knife strips. They feel cleaner than blocks. Either way, it's best not to throw knives in a drawer, so choose a space close-by on your counter or wall for strip or block. You don't want to reach into a drawer and come up against a hidden knife.

Under that prep utensil drawer, store all of your cutting boards and prep bowls so they are all within reach. I also like to keep a lazy susan for my most used spices, oils and honey/maple syrup in the cabinet just above this prep area.