

The Organized Kitchen

You want to eat healthier and lose some weight? As with many things in life, in order to achieve your goal, you need to plan and set yourself up for success. One of the most important, and often overlooked, steps in this process is to organize your kitchen!

By organizing your kitchen, you will create a welcoming environment where you will be more likely to want to prepare healthy foods and eat at home. Here are some tips for setting up your kitchen to encourage healthy eating.

- **Clear the counters, cabinets, and the refrigerator.** It is hard to choose and/or prepare healthy menu items when we cannot even access the ingredients or the tools in order to do so. So, start first by clearing your counter tops, making sure to remove any non-kitchen items, like paperwork. Next, empty out your pantry, cabinets and drawers. You may be surprised to see how many unnecessary things you have stored away. For example, I found that I actually owned several duplicate utensils, 3 bottles of garlic powder and many ingredients that had long expired! Once you have purged the cabinets, then you can attack the refrigerator. Again, make sure to take out everything so that you can start with a clean slate.
- **Make room for healthy foods.** Once you have removed everything and gotten rid of the unnecessary items, you can now restock in an organized, healthy way! You can start this by either tossing any less-healthy food items OR putting them away in places that are both harder to see and to reach. You want to use the most visible spaces in your refrigerator and cabinets for the healthier foods. For example, instead of shoving fresh produce in the bottom drawer where it gets forgotten, move it to the center shelf.
- **Revamp your containers.** Invest in some nice-looking, sturdy clear food containers. It is best to go with either glass OR safer plastics—#1PET, #2HDPE, #4LDPE, and #5PP. Storing food in clear containers makes it easy to see the contents inside without removing lids. The visibility makes it easier to manage the stored food. For example, you can check up and use leftovers before they go bad rather than finding an opaque container with “mystery meat” inside.
- **Organize your tools.** Once you have sorted through your pots, pans and utensils and gotten rid of the things you are not using, it is time to store them in a functional way. When cooking healthy meals, you will need to have your cookware and utensils handy. You may consider adding a wall-mounted bar where you can hang utensils OR a magnetic bar to hang your knives. You will likely want to keep your most-used pots and pans very close to your stove. According to *Cooking Light Magazine* (<http://www.cookinglight.com>), some of the essentials for a healthy kitchen include:
 - Chef’s knife
 - Colander/strainer
 - Cutting boards
 - Kitchen shears
 - Measuring cups- both a set of dry and liquid
 - Measuring spoons
 - Box-grater
 - Paring knife or peeler
 - Whisk

I would add to that list a non-stick pan, baking dish, sauce pan, sheet pan, slow-cooker, mixing bowls (at least 1 small and 1 large), metal spatula, salad spinner and wooden spoons.

- **Do a little “strategic prepping”.** When you get home from the grocery store, take a few minutes to peel and chop your produce and place it into those clear containers. Why? This will simplify recipe preparation later when you likely have less time. Also, when are in search of a quick snack, the prepared produce can fit the bill instead of having to resort to chips, cookies or crackers.
- **Less chaos = more calm.** Now that you have organized your space and filled it with some healthier food choices, food preparation and consumption can be a more “zen-like” experience. To take this a step further, consider playing some calming music in the background. When you eat your meal, this more relaxed environment can slow your consumption and increase your satisfaction.

Some information from retrieved from: <http://appforhealth.com/2016/01/how-to-organize-your-kitchen>

Check out the side-dish recipe below, page 3. Note the use of some of the recommended tools: peeler, chef’s knife, measuring spoons and a sheet pan. Enjoy this tasty and healthy recipe.

This article was written by Kara Meeks, MS, RDN, CDE. She is a Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator in the Augusta Health Diabetes and Nutrition Education Department. If you have any questions related to this article, please contact Dana Breeding, RN Health Educator in Community Outreach of Augusta Health at 332-4988 or 932-4988.