

Make Over Your Kitchen for a Healthy Heart

8 ways to stock your kitchen for heart health

If you want to give your family's daily diet a "heart health makeover," start with your kitchen. It stands to reason that how we fill our kitchen -- in the pantry, refrigerator or freezer -- sets the pattern for what we eat.

If you stock your kitchen with nutritious but flavorful whole foods, you and your family are more likely to eat a heart-smart diet and reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

The American Heart Association recommends 6 general ways to eat a heart-healthy diet:

- Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole grain and high fiber foods.
- Consume fish, especially fatty fish such as mackerel, lake trout, salmon, or herring, at least twice a week.
- Choose lean meats and vegetarian foods in order to limit intake of saturated fat to less than 7% of calories, trans fat to less than 1% of calories, and cholesterol to less than 300 milligrams a day.
- Limit sugary drinks and foods with added sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than about 1 teaspoon a day.

Those six suggestions may sound like a lot to think about. But it adds up to one guideline: Eat a diet rich in mostly whole foods.

Think about the most wholesome foods you know: fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, etc. Most of these foods we buy whole, not in a processed package. And while whole foods don't carry a nutrition label like package food does, we all know that whole foods are naturally healthy.

When you do buy packaged foods, be sure to read the label. Look for foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium, yet high in fiber.

Here are my top 8 tips to make over your kitchen for a healthy heart!

1. Switch to Heart-Smart Cooking Oils

It makes nutritional sense to choose cooking fats that have the least amount of saturated fat and trans fat, and the most healthful fats (omega-3s and monounsaturated fats). When you do this, you end up with a couple of oils in your kitchen:

- **Canola oil** for most of your cooking. Canola oil contains the lowest amount of saturated fat. Canola oil is the 5th highest oil in monounsaturated fat and it contains the most omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Olive oil** when it works in the recipe. Olive oil contains the most monounsaturated fat, very little saturated fat, and some helpful phytochemicals that are found in olives. Olive oil tastes great, so use this oil when you want to impart flavor.
- Other oils such as safflower, sunflower, soybean, or flaxseed oil are additional heart-healthy fats that can also be used.

2. Switch to a Smarter Margarine for Table Use and Some Baking

If a recipe calls for melted margarine or butter, you can usually replace it with canola oil. But there are times when margarine is required: To spread on toast, to make cookie dough, or for the added flavor. To qualify as a smarter margarine that you store in the refrigerator, margarine should have a little less fat than butter or stick margarine (around 8 grams of fat per tablespoon works well), the smallest amount of saturated fat possible (2 grams of saturated fat or less per tablespoon) and no trans fat. Smart margarines should also contain mostly monounsaturated fat or polyunsaturated fat, and for an added bonus, look for ones with omega-3 fats.

3. De-Junk Your Pantry

Two characteristics define junk food -- the absence of nutritional value (fiber, vitamins, minerals, protein, phytochemicals, etc.) and the overabundance of fat, sodium, or sugar. This describes many of the foods Americans know and love: fast food, soda, candy bars, chips, doughnuts, ice cream, and more. One of the keys to making over your kitchen is to de-junk your pantry.

Fill your pantry with healthier foods and products that you enjoy eating:

- Instead of Pop Tarts, have some low-fat, low-sugar, high-fiber protein or granola bars; whole-grain, low-sugar breakfast cereals; or low-sugar instant oatmeal packets.
- Instead of chips or cheese puffs, stock your pantry with low-salt mixed nuts, reduced-fat whole grain crackers (hopefully lower in sodium), whole grain pretzels, or light popcorn, which is also a whole grain.

It's always a great idea to keep your pantry well-stocked with products that you tend to use in your healthful cooking. Some examples:

- Lower-sodium broth and reduced-fat soups
- Whole-grain noodles
- Brown rice
- Canned tuna packed in water
- Sardines
- Bottled marinara sauce
- Whole-wheat flour
- Canned beans
- Fat-free refried beans

4. De-junk Your Refrigerator and Freezer

Fill your refrigerator with healthier foods that you enjoy eating and drinking.

- Instead of soda, try flavored, sugar-free mineral water, no-calorie iced tea, iced decaf coffee, nonfat or low-fat milk, diet soda (consumed in moderation), or iced water flavored with fresh slices of lemon or lime.
- Instead of high-fat frozen foods, consider light frozen entrees that contain lean meat, vegetables, and possibly a grain.
- Instead of high-fat corn dogs, stock your freezer with lower-fat franks and whole-grain hot dog buns that you can defrost quickly in a microwave.

- Instead of frozen pies or pastries, keep frozen fruit on hand (unsweetened) so you can whip up a smoothie or yogurt/fruit parfait with a moment's notice.

Also stock your refrigerator with products that help you cook and bake heart-smart meals at home:

- Egg substitute
- Fat-free half-and-half
- Reduced-fat cheese
- Fat-free sour cream
- Nonfat plain yogurt
- Light cream cheese
- Light bottled vinaigrettes
- Assorted mustards and vinegars
- Pesto sauce made with olive oil

5. Dial It Down on the Bad-Boy Products

At least 10 ingredients should carry a red flag warning if you are trying to boost nutrition while cutting fat, calories, and cholesterol.

- Mayonnaise (regular)
- Bacon and bacon grease
- Heavy whipping cream
- Light whipping cream
- Half-and-half cream
- Puff pastry
- Cheese (full fat)
- Sausage, cooked
- Coconut oil
- Butter
- Pie crust dough

Beware of using these ingredients in recipes. They'll load up the meal with fat.

For example, a quarter cup of mayonnaise has 396 calories and 44 grams of fat -- and that's not even counting the fat from other ingredients in the recipe!

And it's not unusual for soup, sauce, and dessert recipes with liquid heavy whipping cream to call for a quarter cup per serving. That's 205 calories and 22 grams of fat per serving! Half-and-half cream brings it down to 79 calories and 7 grams of fat per quarter cup. But if you're making a cream soup, each serving could contain a cup of half-and-half cream, which comes to about 300+ calories and 28+ grams of fat.

6. Fill Your Fridge With Must-Have Heart-Smart Foods

Start with the fresh and frozen vegetables and fruits you like. Then add whole-grain products that you can make into quick entrees (like whole-wheat pita, whole-wheat tortillas, and whole-grain pasta cooked al dente and chilling in the refrigerator). Next, shop for:

- Fresh and frozen fish you enjoy

- Lean meat and vegetarian meat options like veggie burgers or soy-based meatballs
- Low-fat dairy products such as low-fat yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese
- 1% or skim milk
- Egg substitute
- Sugar-free beverages that you like to drink, such as iced green tea, unsweetened, and mineral water

7. Use Your Freezer for Healthy Conveniences

Your freezer is your friend! If you have plenty of fruits and vegetables that you like in your freezer, there will never be a reason not to add them to your meals.

- Frozen blueberries and raspberries work well when mixed into muffin and pancake batter and for topping oatmeal or waffles.
- Frozen spinach adds color and nutrients to any omelet, pasta dish, pizza, or casserole.
- Frozen broccoli florets, baby carrots, or frozen mixed vegetables are there when you need them for a quick side dish or for mixing in with the entree.

Look for frozen dinners that are low in sodium and saturated fat, but high in fiber. Keep them on hand for "every man for himself" meals that inevitably come along on certain weeknights. Also stock healthful frozen products your family enjoys, such as veggie burgers, healthful frozen pizza options, or meatless meatballs.

8. Make Over How You Follow Directions on Packages

You can play around with some mixes and boxed products to lower the fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and calories.

- Instead of the 4 tablespoons of butter or stick margarine called for when making macaroni & cheese from the box, add a tablespoon or two of heart-smart margarine and a tablespoon or two of fat-free sour cream to make up the difference.
- To keep cholesterol low, Instead of adding three eggs to a dessert mix, beat in 1/4-cup egg substitute or two egg whites for every whole egg called for.

Another trick is looking on the nutrition label to see if the product already has some fat in the dry mix. If it has 3 to 4 grams of fat in the mix per serving, you probably can get away with not adding ANY of the fat they tell you to add. You will need to substitute something liquid or mostly moist to make up the difference though. Depending on the product, you could use:

- Fat-free sour cream (for use in a cream pasta product)
- Low-sodium broth (for use in a stuffing mix)
- Low-fat or light flavored yogurt (for use in a muffin mix)
- Strong coffee (for use in a brownie or cake mix)
- Applesauce

Source: WebMD.com

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